

Healthy habits are key to maintaining health even while taking multiple prescriptions

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Lifestyle habits including eating a healthy diet, getting regular exercise and not smoking can reduce the risk of death, even for people taking multiple medications, according to preliminary research to be presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2020.

"We've long known about the benefits of leading a [healthy lifestyle](#). The results from our study underscore the importance of each person's ability to improve their health through [lifestyle changes](#) even if they are dealing with multiple health issues and taking multiple prescription medications," said lead author Neil Kelly, Ph.D., a medical student at Weill Cornell Medicine of Cornell University in New York City.

The study analyzed data from more than 20,000 participants of the Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) study (average age of 64; 56% women). At the start of the study, 44% of participants were taking four or fewer prescription medications; 39% were taking five to nine prescription medicines; and 17% were taking 10 or more prescription medications.

Researchers evaluated the number of medications taken, level of participation in four healthy behaviors and all-cause death rates. The types of medications and the conditions they were used to treat (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, cognitive impairment, etc.), varied widely among study participants. The healthy lifestyle behaviors were physical activity; smoking abstinence; low sedentary time; and following a Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes legumes, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish and [olive oil](#) and moderation for dairy products and wine.

At follow-up roughly 10 years later, the analysis found:

- a healthy lifestyle decreased the risk of death regardless of the number of medications a person was taking; and
- the higher the number of healthy [lifestyle habits](#) a person had, the lower their risk of death.

"It's especially important for health care professionals to counsel patients and develop interventions that can maximize healthy lifestyle behaviors, even among patients with several [prescription medications](#)," Kelly added. "It's important for the public to understand that there is never a bad time to adopt healthy behaviors. These can range from eating a healthier diet to taking a daily walk in their neighborhood. A healthier lifestyle buys more time."

More information: Session: LF.APS.07 -Epidemiological Insights into Physical Activity and Cardiovascular Health, www.abstractsonline.com/pp8/?....4/presentation/35202

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