

Fidget Your Way to Longer Life

Every Little Bit of Activity -- Even the Kind You Barely Notice -- May Count

Even the simplest physical activity may lengthen lives -- no sweating required, new research shows. In fact, mundane physical activity like household chores may count.

Sound too good to be true? That's the finding from the National Institute on Aging's Todd Manini, PhD, and colleagues.

"Simply expending energy through any activity may influence survival in older adults," they write in *The Journal of the American Medical Association's* July 12 issue.

Does their theory hold water? Perhaps, says a journal editorial. Manini's finding on longevity motion is "provocative and if documented by future research would have major implications for physical activity recommendations," the editorialists write.

Active Elders

Manini's team studied 302 healthy adults in Pittsburgh and Memphis who were 70 to 82 years old. When the study started, participants said they had no problem climbing at least 10 stairs, walking 0.4 kilometers, or performing basic daily chores.

Researchers first checked how much carbon dioxide each participant typically exhaled.

Greater activity means greater carbon dioxide production, the researchers reasoned. Think of a sprinter panting hard after a race, compared to the calm, even breathing of a spectator watching the race.

To measure carbon dioxide production, participants drank a glass of water with "labeled" hydrogen and oxygen. Over the next four hours, the researchers checked participants' urine and blood samples to determine carbon dioxide production and total energy expenditure (amount of calories burned per day).

Participants took the carbon dioxide test twice, two weeks apart.

Calories Burned, Death Rate

The researchers then calculated how many calories each of the participants burned per day. Every calorie counted, whether it was burned in formal exercise or in digestion, household chores, or simply fidgeting.

Participants also rated their own health and reported their physical activities, whether mild (such as walking) or vigorous (jogging, for instance).

After that, their only obligation was taking two yearly phone calls -- over an average of six years -- from the researchers.

Those phone calls had a simple purpose: See which participants were still alive. Year after year, most participants picked up the phone when the researchers called. But 55 participants -- about 18% of the entire group -- died during the follow-up period.

Movers Live Longer

The most physically active participants were nearly 70% less likely to die than those with the lowest physical activity level. Self-rated health, education, smoking status, and health conditions at the study's start scarcely changed the results.

The odds of dying during the study were 12% for the most active group, nearly 18% for those with medium physical activity levels, and nearly 25% for the least active group, the study shows.

Many studies have linked physical activity to better health. That's one reason the CDC recommends everyone get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at least five days per week.

But this particular project had a twist the researchers didn't expect: The most active participants didn't give themselves enough credit.

Stealthy Moves

The participants' self-rated physical activity levels were pretty similar across the board. No group claimed to be much more active than everyone else.

But the objective data told a different story. In other words, some participants burned calories without even noticing it.

"Most importantly, this accumulation is from usual daily activities that expend energy and not necessarily from volitional exercise," write Manini and colleagues.

And by the researchers' calculations, every extra 287 calories burned per day roughly equaled a 30% drop in participants' death rate.

'Striking' Findings

The findings need to be confirmed, partly because the study was small, the researchers note.

Journal editorialists Steven Blair, PED, and William Haskell, PhD, agree.

Blair works in Dallas at The Cooper Institute; Blair is on staff at Stanford University's medical school. They call Manini's study "striking."

But will ultra-easy activity -- like getting up to change the TV channel manually -- really add to your years? Stay tuned.

"Ultimately, public health experts should consider how these results can be translated into recommendations for individuals," Blair and Haskell write.

Meanwhile, you've nothing to lose by adding more activity to your day, even if it's the type that makes personal trainers yawn.

By Miranda Hitti

Courtesy: WebMD Health News