

Mobility explains the association between social activity and mortality risk in older people

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Social activity and health correlate in old age, but less is known about what explains this association. The results of a study carried out in the Gerontology Research Center showed that part of the association between social activity and mortality was mediated by mobility among older men and women. Of other potential mediators, having less depressive symptoms and better cognitive functioning are merely prerequisites for social activity.

"The health-enhancing influences of social activity may be partly explained by better mobility among persons who are socially active. Moreover, social activity may maintain mobility and thus decrease [mortality risk](#), as many [social activities](#) also include physical activity," says Katja Pynnönen, a PhD student from the University of Jyväskylä, Department of Health Sciences.

Collective social activity researched in this study included, for example cultural activities, acting in organizations, travelling, [physical activity](#) in groups, and dancing. When participating in these kinds of activities, a person acts together with other people and may experience a sense of belonging to a group and a feeling of being liked and accepted.

Helping others in various daily tasks is an example of productive social activity which may give feelings of doing good and being useful.

"Good [cognitive functioning](#) and having less [depressive symptoms](#) seemed to be prerequisites for social activity. Thus, it is important to recognize and take into account those older people who have memory problems and are melancholy, and may need extra support to participate in social activities," says Pynnönen.

The study is part of the Evergreen project carried

out in the University of Jyväskylä. In 1988, 406 men and 775 women aged 65–84 years took part in face-to-face interviews. Data on mortality were drawn from the population register.

More information: Do mobility, cognitive functioning, and depressive symptoms mediate the association between social activity and mortality risk among older men and women? Pynnönen Katja, Törmäkangas Timo, Rantanen Taina, Lyyra Tiina-Mari , European Journal of Ageing, October 2013 [DOI: 10.1007/s10433-013-0295-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-013-0295-3)

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