

Regular physical activity can maintain or improve frailty

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Frailty is the medical term for becoming weaker or experiencing lower levels of activity or energy. Becoming frail as we age increases our risk for poor health, falls, disability, and other serious concerns.

Aging increases the risks for becoming frail. As more of us live longer, it's likely that frailty will pose a larger public health problem in the near future. Experts in geriatrics (the field of health care focused on care for [older adults](#)) suggest that maintaining a [healthy lifestyle](#) may reduce your chances of becoming frail.

One aspect of a healthy [lifestyle](#) is getting [regular physical activity](#). However, studies on the association between physical activity and frailty among older adults show different results. Some studies suggest that regular [physical activity](#) could delay frailty and reduce its severity, but other studies do not. And most of the studies have examined people aged 50 to 70, so the information we have for people over age 70 is limited.

To address this gap, researchers conducted a new study as part of a European project that promotes healthy aging in older adults. They examined the benefits of assistance that helps older adults follow their prescribed medications and prevent falls, frailty, and loneliness. The participants received care at study sites in five European countries (Spain, Greece, Croatia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). The study results were published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

Among other questions, the participants were asked, "How often do you engage in activities that require a low or moderate level of energy such as gardening, cleaning the car, or taking a walk?"

Researchers considered that "regular frequency" was engaging in such activities more than once a week; "low frequency" involved engaging in these activities once a week or less.

Of the participants, 1,215 adults over the age of 70 were included in the group that received assistance. 1,110 received no intervention but were followed for comparison. Participants in the first group received a risk assessment, shared decision-making, and care aimed at reducing their fall risk, inappropriate medication use, loneliness, and frailty.

Compared with participants who were moderately active at the start of the study, participants who were moderately active once a week or less were significantly more physically, psychologically, and socially frail at the study's follow-up period.

The participants who were regularly, moderately active were the least frail, and participants who were moderately active less than once a week were the most frail.

The researchers learned that people over 70 who were physically active on a regular basis, as well as people who increased their level of activity to a regular basis, were able to improve or maintain their level of [frailty](#)—not only physically, but also psychologically and socially.

More information: Xuxi Zhang et al, Longitudinal Association Between Physical Activity and Frailty Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.16391](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.16391)

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