

Do your chores and live longer

Daily activities benefit elderly, research shows

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Associated Press

Chicago — Forget jumping jacks and treadmills. Just doing household chores and other mundane activities of daily living is enough to help older adults live longer, new research suggests.

Elderly couch potatoes were much more likely to die within about six years than those whose lives included regular activity no more strenuous than washing dishes, vacuuming, gardening and climbing stairs, according to the study of adults age 72 to 80.

About 12 percent of people with the highest amount of daily activity died during the six-year follow-up, compared with nearly 25 percent of the least active participants. The government-funded study appears in today's *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"This is a monumental study," said Dr. Andrew Goldberg, a geriatrics expert who was not involved in the research. "They used state-of-the-art methodology to answer a very important question, which is how important is it to remain physically active."

The highest activity level studied "translates into a 50 percent reduction in mortality. That's really big," said Goldberg, a University of Maryland professor and director of geriatric research at the Baltimore Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

The most active among the 302 adults studied didn't even do much, if any, rigorous exercise. But they did burn about 1,000 calories daily through activity, or about 600 more than the least active.

For someone weighing 170

pounds, roughly the study's average body weight, that would equal about 3½ hours of daily activity including yard work and household chores, versus less than two hours of similar activity for the least active.

The most active were more likely to work for pay and to climb two or more flights of stairs daily, but surprisingly didn't do higher amounts of traditional exercise, said lead author Todd Manini, a scientist at the National Institute on Aging.

The study results don't mean that older adults who engage in a more intense fitness regimen should stop, or that they won't gain perhaps even greater health benefits from it, the researchers said. Rather, they said, the study should be encouraging for those intimidated by traditional exercise, illustrating that activity doesn't have to be strenuous to be beneficial.

The researchers used a laboratory technique that some consider the gold standard of measuring expended energy and more reliable than self-reported activity levels.

Participants drank specially formulated water that is expelled from the body as carbon dioxide, which is a direct measure of energy use. Fourteen days later, researchers measured the amount of special water remaining in the body. Factoring in resting metabolic rate, that determined how much energy had been expended through activity.

"You don't have to be motivated to do a mini-triathlon or a 10k," said Dr. Sandra Selikson, a geriatrics specialist at Montefiore Medical Center in New York. "Just being active ... even benefited people who had medical problems. Even doing something is better than nothing."

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