Physically Active Older Folks Get Depressed Less

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Many people know exercise can put some pep in your step, but staying active can do a little more than that. For the elderly, physical activity can decrease the chances of suffering from depression, according to a Swedish study by the University of Gothenburg reported by ScienceDaily.

For the study, researchers followed 17,500 elderly participants (average age 64) from 11 European countries for two and a half years. Scientists examined their physical activity and their level of depression, among other things. Researchers found that participants who exercised showed fewer signs of depression. And what's more, scientists noted that heavily depressed participants were less likely to exercise.

"We do not yet know for sure what the causal relationship between physical activity and depression is like," said Magnus Lindwall, a docent (associate professor) in exercise and health psychology at the university and one of the study's authors. "What is clear is that elderly people who are physically active are less depressed, but higher levels of depression can also lead to less exercise, and this suggests there is a mutual influence."

It's important for researchers to determine what motivates older people to exercise and to find ways to increase that motivation, Lindwall said, adding that, conversely, researchers should identify barriers such as depression that prevent exercise.

Current theories propose that people who feel competent and free to make their own decisions are more self-motivated to exercise and maintain a fitness regimen over the long term, unlike those who don't.

Click here and here to read more about how exercise benefits older adults' mental health.

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