

# Outgoing senior citizens are living longer

For the elderly, an active social life might be just as important as exercise to stay healthy, a Harvard study says.

By Emma Ross  
Associated Press  
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LONDON — Elderly people who like to eat out, play cards, go to movies and take part in other social activities live an average 1/2 years longer than more reclusive people, a new study finds.

Health experts typically recommend that the elderly stay active, but the study by Harvard University researchers suggests that simply mixing with other people may offer as great a benefit as regular exercise.

Experts say the study, published in this week's British Medical Journal, goes further than previous ones because it compares different types of activities and concludes that the benefits of social and productive pursuits are equivalent to and independent of the merits of exercise.

"There is a positive nugget for people who can't exercise, or won't exercise," said Richard Suzman, associate director for behavioral and social research at the U.S. National Institute of Aging, who was not connected with the study. "It shows there are other alternatives that look like they might be just as beneficial."

It is widely assumed that staying active is good for people be-

cause of the physical component, said Thomas Glass, an assistant professor of health and social behavior at Harvard's School of Public Health, who led the study.

"That social activities involving almost no physical exertion played a measurable role at all in length of life is really quite something," he said. "This is perhaps the strongest circumstantial evidence we've had to date that having a meaningful purpose at the end of life lengthens life."

Glass and his colleagues followed 2,761 residents of New Haven, Conn., ages 65 and older for 13 years to see how exercise, social and productive activity were related to their chances of dying during the study's duration.

Factors known to contribute to longer life, such as superior health or education, did not influence the results significantly, the researchers said.

Subjects were asked how frequently they were involved in 14 common activities categorized as mainly social, productive or physical.

The physical activities examined were walking, fitness exercises and active sports or swimming.

Social activities included church attendance, going to movies, restaurants and sporting events, day trips, playing cards, games or bingo, and participation in social groups.

Pursuits categorized as productive included gardening, preparing meals, shopping, employment and paid or unpaid community work.

The three types of activities overlapped to some extent and

many people were in more than one category. People in each category were compared only to those participating in their types of activities.

Among those who participated in social activities, the most active were 19 percent less likely to die during the study's duration than those least engaged in social activities, Glass said. Those most socially active lived about 2 1/2 years longer, he said.

When it came to physical fitness, those who exercised most frequently were 15 percent less likely to die before the study's end than their more sedentary counterparts. They also survived about 2 1/2 years longer.

Those who were most engaged in productive pursuits were 23 percent less likely to die than those least involved in such pursuits. The difference in longevity between those two groups was about four years.

Because the categories were not compared with each other, however, the findings cannot be construed to mean that being con-

structive is better than exercising when it comes to extending life, Glass said.

When each activity was examined individually, doing a lot, as opposed to not much, extended life in almost every case regardless of the activity, Glass said.

## Correction

Due to error, the following information appeared incorrectly in our advertisement in the Answer Book published Wednesday, August 18.

It should have read:

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**85 Stoughton Rd.**

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W. Bellline at Park Street exit



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