From the community:

Your social life could help you live longer

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Want to live longer? Experts say older adults should increase their participation in social activities.

According to a recent study, published in the journal BMJ Open, it is important for newly retired individuals to remain active in the community to maintain their quality of life and health.

The study analyzed adults engaged in social groups and who were also newly retired. The study said, "Adults involved in two or more membership groups prior to retiring had a two percent risk of death in the first six years of retirement if they maintained their membership."

However, if an individual did not continue to participate in those activities, after retirement, the risk of death increases to 12 percent.

A social group may include anything from playing cards once a week with friends, to joining a book club, a church group or an exercise group.

"The sense of belonging that social group connections provide helps people sustain a meaningful and healthy life," said Niklas Steffans, a lead researcher of the study and lecturer at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, in the study news release.

Steffans believes that social health could be just as important as financial well-being and physical health. However, experts agree it's important to remember that physical health should not be ignored just because someone may have a prosperous social life.

A good balance and observation between mental health and physical health is the best way to achieve quality of life, according to Dr. Anthony Weston, family medicine physician at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, Ill.

"While socializing and being part of something bigger than oneself is very important for our well-being, a direct cause and effect relationship between group participation and health outcomes is difficult to draw," he says.

"So often we think of retirement as blissful freedom, but the social void and loss of day to day structure is a major adjustment," says Dr. Weston. "Many folks thrive, but others of us can end up depressed, inactive, or isolated…all eroding at our health and longevity."

In order to live a long, healthy life, Dr. Weston says, "Joining an exercise class, volunteering with a local organization, or just spending more time with loved ones can be the perfect medicine."

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