REVEALED: The sociable hobbies that will help you live a happier, longer life

PENSIONERS who pursue social hobbies such as those enjoyed by gardening groups and book clubs, live longer, happier lives, a study has found.

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The health benefits of having a sociable hobby are similar to doing regular exercise, according to the research.

The findings, published online by the journal BMJ Open, show that the more groups a person is involved in, the fewer the risks to their health.

Researchers found that after retirement, people's long term health deteriorates rapidly.

However, when they tracked the health of 424 participants over a six-year period they found those that were members of social groups lived longer.

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing started in 2002/3 and recorded data from participants over the age of 50.

Those who recorded a good quality of life prior to retirement were more likely to record a higher quality of life after retirement.

But the research also found that those who were members of social groups - such as book clubs or church choirs - were also more likely to record a higher quality of life after giving up work.

The data showed that every social group accounted for around a 10 per cent drop in life quality six years later after they retired.

But if a person was a member of two social groups before retiring and remained a member, their chance of death was just two per cent.

But if they quit both groups, their probability of dying rose to 12 per cent.

Study author Dr Niklas Steffens, of The University of Queensland in Australia, said: "We can see that the effects of physical activity on health were comparable to those associated with maintaining old group memberships and developing new ones.

"They suggest that as much as practitioners may help retirees adjust by providing support with financial planning, they may also help by providing social planning.

"In this regard, practical interventions should focus on helping retirees to maintain their sense of purpose and belonging by assisting them to connect to groups and communities that are meaningful to them."

In 2014, a study by researchers at University College London, as well as Princeton University and Stony Brook University, found that older people who reported the greatest sense of purpose in life survived longer than those who reported having little sense of purpose, suggesting that having a meaning in life might play a role in protecting people's health.