Pensioners 'live longer if they take part in activities like book clubs and church groups'

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Pensioners with an active social life are likely to live longer, new research suggest.

According to the study, being part of a book club or church group has as many health benefits as [exercise](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/fitness) for [OAPs](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/pensioner).

In fact the more social groups a person belongs after they retire the lower their risk of death, researchers claim.

People who are part of clubs are also more likely to have a better quality of life, the researchers said.

Finishing work is a major life change and previous studies have suggested that people's health and wellbeing can deteriorate after retirement.

In a bid to assess the impact of social groups on retirees, researchers examined almost 424 English adults over the age of 50 for six years after retirement.

They were compared with the same number of people, matched for age, sex, and health status, but who were still working.

Each participant was asked how many different organisations, clubs, or societies they belonged to and also answered questions on their physical health and quality of life.

The study, published in the online journal BMJ Open, found that 6.6 per cent of the retiree sample died in the first six years after they finished work.

Retirees who had two group memberships before retirement had a 2 per cent risk of death in the first six years of retirement if they maintained membership in two groups, a 5 per cent risk if they lost one group and a 12 per cent risk if they lost both groups, the researchers found.

No such patterns were seen for those still in formal employment.

Researchers also assessed whether changes in physical activity levels affected risk of death.

They found that if a person exercised vigorously once a week before retiring and maintained this frequency post-retirement, they had a 3 per cent chance of dying in the next six years, a 6 per cent chance if they decreased this frequency to less than weekly and an 11 per cent chance if they stopped exercising vigorously altogether.

"Accordingly, 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," the researchers wrote.

The authors also concluded that for every group membership that participants lost in the year following retirement, their quality of life six years later was approximately 10 per cent lower.

They wrote: "Retiring from work constitutes a major life transition that most people experience at some point in the course of their life, posing significant challenges to health and wellbeing.

"The number of groups that retirees are members of is a predictor of both their subsequent quality of life and their likelihood of dying; being as good a predictor as physical activity."