Being in a book group could boost health as much as exercise

Being in one of more social clubs could be as good for pensioners as regular exercise, a study in BMJ Open suggests

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10:30PM GMT 15 Feb 2016

Being in a book group or bridge club could be just as good for your health as doing regular exercise [**past the age of 60,**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/goodlife/) research suggests.

The findings published online in BMJ Open suggests retirees who are part of social clubs are likely to live for longer.

Researchers examined more than 400 English adults over the age of 50 for six years [**after retirement.**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/financialservices/investing/investment-and-pensions/9800525/Telegraph-Retirement-Income-Calculator.html)

Each participant was asked how many different organisations, clubs, or societies they belonged to and also answered questions on their [**physical health**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/active/fighting-forty-how-to-maintain-a-healthy-heart/) and [**quality of life.**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/property/3361975/50-best-places-to-retire-in-Britain.html)

The study 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 dropped out of one group and a 12 per cent risk if they lost both groups, the researchers found.

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

They found that if a person exercised vigorously once a week after retirement they had a 3 per cent chance of dying in the next six years.

Those who did this less than once a week had a 6 per cent risk of death within six years, while those who stopped all vigorous exercise had an 11 per cent risk of death within the timeframe.

Study author Dr Niklas Steffens, of The University of Queensland in Australia, said physical activity and group memberships seemed to have a similar level of effect. However, the study did not prove cause and effect.

Those in failing health might have been more likely to drop out of clubs, and to exercise less frequently.

"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,” researchers said.