**Joining a book club, church or sports group linked to longer life after retirement**

By [Ariana Eunjung Cha](http://www.washingtonpost.com/people/ariana-eunjung-cha) February 16

One of the most troubling findings about aging has to do with what happens to your health after you retire. While some people find that their bodies and minds thrive in the absence of the stress of work, some 10 to 25 percent experience a significant drop in their health and well-being.

In trying to explain the different health trajectories of retirees, scientists are increasingly focusing on social factors. The theory is that social engagement or isolation can affect a person's cognitive functioning and happiness, which in turn can affect their overall health.

In a study published in [BMJ Open](http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/2/e010164) this week, researchers looked at 848 people 50 or older living in Britain. Half were retiring, while the other half, of similar age and health, were not.

The study found that people with a good quality of life before retirement were more likely to have a similar quality of life after retirement.

But people who were members of social groups — which could be a sports club, religious organization, trade union or any other kind of leisure or professional group — had a lower risk of death in the first six years of retirement.

Those who belonged to two groups before retirement and continued their activity in these groups had a 2 percent risk of death in the first six years, 5 percent if they remained in only one and 12 percent if they gave up on both. This connection between social group membership and risk of death was not seen for those who had not retired.

The researchers calculated that this was as good of a predictor as regular exercise.

"These findings not only identify a new locus for retirement research but also suggest a new avenue for practical intervention," Niklas K. Steffens, a researcher from the University of Queensland in Australia, and his co-authors wrote.