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PENSIONERS IN BOOK CLUBS LIVE LONGER'  
  
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IF you want your retirement to be a new chapter in your **life** rather than the last page, joining a book group could help you live longer, scientists claimed yesterday.

In fact, maintaining social links in old age might even be more important for health than keeping fit, research showed.

Experts tracked 424 English men and women as they went through their first six years of retirement.

They found that the more book, church, sporting and other groups they belonged to after they stopped work, the lower their risk of an early **death.** There was a six-fold difference in mortality rates between those who stayed a member of at least two of the **social groups** they belonged to before retirement, and those who stopped attending the clubs.

People who joined new clubs were even less likely to die early, according to the results in the medical journal BMJ Open.

This is thought to be because social isolation has a profound effect on health. The authors said the number of social relationships people kept during retirement had more of a bearing on **life** expectancy than exercise, smoking or drinking.

The researchers, from the University of Queensland in Australia, compared the volunteers with a second group of people of similar ages still working.

Group membership made no difference to workers' mortality rates, and the researchers said the figures were similar to those for retirees who stayed fit.

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