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Want to have a longer **life?** Join a book club!  
  
**BYLINE:** Ben Spencer  
  
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BEING a member of a book club may extend the span your **life** in retirement, research suggests.

Scientists found that maintaining social links in old age might even be more important for health than keeping fit.

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

They found that the more **social groups** the pensioners belonged to after they stop working, the lower their risk of an early **death.**

The scientists found a six-fold different in mortality rates between those who stayed a member of at least two **social groups** they had belonged to before retirement, and those who stopped attending the clubs. And people who joined new clubs were even less likely to die early, according to the results published last night in BMJ Open, a UK medical journal. The researchers, from the University of Queensland in Australia, 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.' Previous studies have found that up to 25% of the newly-retired experience a significant drop in health soon after giving up work.

This is thought to be because social isolation has a profound effect on health - particularly increasing the risk of dementia, depression and cognitive decline. The authors wrote that the number of strong social relationships people maintain during retirement has more of a bearing on **life** expectancy than physical exercise, smoking or drinking.

The researchers looked at data from 424 adults, who were tracked for six years after retirement. They were compared with a second group of people still working, matched for age, sex, and health.

Each participant was asked how many different organisations they belonged to - including leisure groups such as book clubs, community associations such as church or women's societies, sporting clubs, or professional organisations such as trade unions. The authors found that 6.6% of the retirees died in the first six years after they finished work. Those who had maintained two group memberships had a 2% risk of **death** in the first six years of retirement, those who gave up one group had a 5% risk of **death**, and those who stopped both groups had a 12% risk.

Those who kept on with two groups but joined one new club saw their risk of **death** drop to 0.95%, and those who joined two new groups were only 0.41% likely to die. Group membership made no difference to mortality rates for those still in formal employment. The researchers also assessed whether changes in physical activity levels affected risk of **death**. They found that if a person exercised once a week before retiring and maintained this frequency post-retirement, they had a 3% chance of dying in the next six years, a 6% chance if they reduced frequency to less than weekly and an 11% chance if they stopped exercising altogether.

The researchers wrote: 'The effects of physical activity on health were comparable to those associated with maintaining old group memberships and developing new ones. Practical interventions should focus on helping retirees to maintain their sense of purpose and belonging by assisting them to connect to groups.' [news@dailymail.ie](mailto:news@dailymail.ie)

'Maintain a sense of purpose'

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