

Study: Running Increases Life Expectancy

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A new study at Stanford University School of Medicine in California says exercise is good for older people.

The results show that older people live longer and have fewer health problems compared to people of the same age who do not exercise.

Study participants over age 50

A group of more than 300 runners over the age of 50 were tracked by Stanford University researchers starting in 1984. Their average age was 58 and most had been running for about 10 years. Now they are in their 70s and 80s. They were compared to a control group of non-runners.

Dr. Eliza Chakravarty says older runners are better able to fight off illness like cancer and less likely to die from a heart attack. "What this shows is that the runners had a very low death rate compared to the controls, where it increased over time," she said. "And by the end of the study the runners had half the mortality rate that the controls did."

Dr. Walter Bortz is a longevity expert who says regular exercise is the key to better health later in life. "Exercise is the treatment for everything. You just go right down the list of things that are killing us and maiming us and costing us money, and physical fitness is the answer to every one of them," he stated.

"Angel Field Ancients"

This group of older runners meets weekly at the Stanford University track. Known as the "Angel Field Ancients," some are in their 80s. Mark Ricaud is 80 years old and has been running for almost 35 years. "I've been many different places I would never go, like trail running, unless you're a backpacker, things like this," he said. "I've run in some very interesting places, which I really enjoyed. I can't do that anymore. I miss that. Now I'm on the track."

Joyce Hanna specializes in health improvement at Stanford. She says it is harder for people to start exercising as they get older, but worth it. "In order to get people who have not been exercising in their 20s, 30s and 40s to start as they get older, they really have to have a firm belief that it's going to do something powerful for them," she said.

But doctors warn that anyone who is older should start an exercise program slowly while maintaining a healthy lifestyle.