Exercise After Retirement: The Secret to Productive Aging

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BACKGROUND

• The biomedical model hypothesizes that physical and mental activity, and the absence of disease are the key contributors to successful aging.
• Current projections estimate that the number of aging adults will significantly increase in the coming years.
• American Heart Association (2013) predicted many of those adults will be burdened with major health problems such as heart disease (70%) and diabetes (25.9%).

• In this study, we interviewed and surveyed participants and attendees of the Huntsman Senior World Games in order to determine factors associated with successful aging post retirement on older adults who are highly active compared to average older adults in physical and psychological well-being.

METHODS

• Participants were recruited from those attending the 2016 Huntsman Senior World Games in St. George, Utah.
• We received survey responses from 197 participants and attendees and conducted one-on-one interviews with 175 of those respondents.
• We focused on specific aspects of spousal relationship quality and depression.
• We also examined the effect of exercise frequency on these psychosocial measures.

RESULTS

• Exercise hours averaged 9.03 per week and most participants reported an increase in activity level after retirement with 70.5% reporting exercise behavior improving after retirement.
• Most of these healthy adults (89.6%) reported being either happy or very happy in their marriage, and most (84.7%) reported low levels of depression.
• Regression analysis showed increased hours of exercise to be associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms (β = -.051, p = .011) and better self-reported health (β = -.032, p = .014).
• As well, most respondents reported lower incidence of diagnosed cardiovascular disease (97.5%) and diagnosed diabetes (90%).

CONCLUSION

• According to both the biomedical and social support theories, participants of the Huntsman Senior World Games are prime examples of healthy and productive aging.
• These senior Olympians demonstrate:
  ✓ an increase of physical activity after retirement
  ✓ remarkably low levels of common health problems such as diabetes and heart disease
  ✓ good psychological health such as happiness in marriage and lower levels of depression
• These associations are important in helping us understand how physical activity and social support impacts successful aging and the health and happiness of adults throughout retirement.

This study was funded by a grant from Gerontology, Brigham Young University awarded to: Wendy C. Birmingham, PhD Lori L. Wadsworth, PhD Man Hung, PhD