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Health

A minute of exercise could boost lifespan

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IF YOU don't exercise for the sake of exercising, doing five or six vigorous activities every day instead, each lasting 10 seconds or so, can make a big difference. A study in the US has found that people who did a total of just over 1 minute of vigorous activity each day were much less likely to die of any cause in the following six years than those who did none.

Only around 15 per cent of adults exercise regularly, says Emmanuel Stamatakis at the University of Sydney.

So he and his colleagues have been exploring the health benefits of the incidental exercise people get, such as walking up a steep hill or carrying heavy loads. They did this by getting people who are already taking part in large health studies to wear monitors for one week to assess their normal activity levels, and then looking at their risk of dying in the following years.

In 2023, the researchers reported results from tens of thousands of people taking part in the UK Biobank study. They found that those who did around 4.4 minutes of vigorous activities a day were 38 per cent less likely to die from

Incidental exercise, like walking up a steep hill, can have huge health benefits

any cause in the following seven or eight years than those people who did none.

Now, the researchers have reported the results from 3300 people taking part in the NHANES study in the US, who were generally less fit than those in the Biobank study. In this group, just 1.1 minutes of vigorous activity a day was needed to lower the risk of dying of any cause in the following six years by 38 per cent ([medRxiv, doi.org/p4nm](https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.09.11.24264100)).

This means 1.1 minutes in the US group produced the same relative improvement as 4.4 minutes in the UK group, but it doesn't mean they reached the same level of health. The US group generally had a lower level of fitness to start with, so their overall risk of dying of any cause was still higher.

"The authors suggest, and I agree, that this may reflect a more inactive, higher-risk population deriving greater benefit from small amounts of vigorous activity," says Carlos Celis-Morales at the University of Glasgow in the UK. ■