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Exercise With A Spouse May Lead To Less Physical Activity In Older Adults Compared To Exercising Alone

By [Andrew Shawn](#) — On Jan 18, 2024

According to a study by researchers at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore), older adults who exercise with their spouse achieve lower physical activity levels than those who exercise alone.

The study involved 240 participants in Singapore aged 54 to 72 years old. The researchers found that those who received personalised feedback on their fitness trackers were more active than those who did not.

The findings suggest that promoting healthy aging through physical activity may be more effective by encouraging older adults to exercise individually, rather than with their spouses.

Dr Sapphire Lin, the lead researcher, stated that older couples have well-established routines that do not include exercising together, making it difficult to incorporate exercise into their daily habits.

Dr Lin added that the research suggests older adults would find it more effective to focus on changing their own routines rather than exercising as a couple.

The study was published in the International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction in October 2023. The research aligns with NTU's focus on health and society as part of its strategic plan, NTU 2025.

How the Study Was Conducted

The NTU researchers gave 240 participants a fitness tracker to record information such as steps taken, heart rate, distance covered, calories burned, minutes of activity, and sleep data.

They were divided into two groups of 30 couples who exercised together and two groups of 60 individuals who exercised without their spouse. Half of the participants received real-time feedback from their fitness trackers, while the other half did not.

Data was collected over 12 weeks on the participants' activity levels.

Lower Daily Step Count for Older Couples Who Exercised Together

The study found that participants who exercised as a couple had lower mean and median step counts, as well as lower high daily step counts compared to those who exercised individually. The researchers believe this is due to the difficulty in making lifestyle changes as a couple.

The findings suggest that encouraging individual behavioural or lifestyle changes may be more effective than doing so as a couple.

Real-time Feedback Helped Achieve Moderate Levels of Physical Activity

Participants who received real-time feedback achieved higher daily step counts, indicating that personalised feedback positively affects older adults' physical activity.

However, real-time feedback did not increase the frequency of older adults achieving low or high step counts, as these were too easy or too difficult to achieve.

The research team is now exploring more in-depth analysis of the data collected from this study to inform policies that will encourage active aging in seniors, as well as exploring how policies can narrow the gaps in health and technology inequalities for older adults of lower socioeconomic status.

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