



Clinical Digest

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Even Minimal Physical Activity Helps in Metabolic Syndrome

Many patients with metabolic syndrome think they have to make major lifestyle changes to lower their risk of death from cardiovascular disease (CVD). But according to a study from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway, managing just 3 hours or less of light physical activity a week may help.

The large prospective study is, to the researchers' knowledge, the first to evaluate the association between physical activity and mortality among people with metabolic syndrome. Of 50,339 people, 13,449 with metabolic syndrome at baseline were asked about their physical activity during leisure time. The questions differentiated between light and hard physical activity during an ordinary week. "Light" was defined as moderate intensity, such as brisk walking. Four

responses were possible for each level of intensity: none; less than 1 hour; 1 to 2 hours; or at least 3 hours. About half of patients younger than 65 years reported a level of exercise equal to or higher than current recommendations; only 9% said they were inactive. Among participants older than 65 years, 41% said they met or exceeded current exercise recommendations, and 19% said they were inactive.

During 10 years of follow-up, 1,839 participants died. After adjusting for confounding factors, increasing physical activity reduced the risk of death from all causes. Highly active people younger than 65 years had a strong reduction in risk (hazard ratio [HR] 0.52), compared with inactive people. Older participants also had a strong reduction (HR 0.59). Among those younger than 65 years, 26% of the deaths were caused by CVD compared with 43% of the deaths among those older than 65 years.

The effect of increasing physical activity on risk of death was linear: in the older group, from 897 all-cause

deaths among patients who reported low-to-no activity, to 121 deaths among those who reported high activity; and in the younger group, from 273 deaths among low-to-no-activity participants to 73 among high-activity participants. Intriguingly, however, the researchers found no difference in mortality due to CVD between those participants with metabolic syndrome who reported being inactive and those who reported low levels of physical activity.

Metabolic syndrome did not significantly raise older people's risk for premature death: The impact of physical activity was the same in people older than 65 years whether or not they had metabolic syndrome. A possible explanation, the researchers suggest, is that people with low tolerance for cardiovascular risk factors die before they reach old age and the risk factors associated with metabolic syndrome have less effect on survival in older individuals. ●

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