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Walking Speed Could Predict Life Span In Seniors: Study



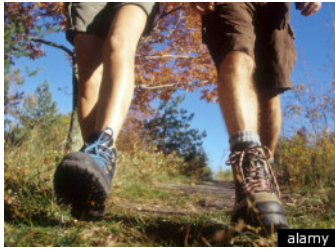
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Want to predict your longevity? Walk -- don't run.

A new [study](#) conducted by the University of Pittsburgh that was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* earlier this week found that the fastest walking seniors lived longer than their slower-walking counterparts. Of the nearly 35,000 seniors who participated in the study, only 35 percent of the slowest walking women 75 years of age lived for 10 more years in comparison to the fastest 75-year old walking females, 91 percent of whom blew out 85 candles



on their birthday cakes. In a similar trend, 87 percent of the fastest 75-year-old men lived for 10 more years in comparison to the slowest walkers, only 19 percent of which to made it to 85 years.

Before you ruthlessly hit the treadmill or start Googling "speed walking technique," clarification is due. Stephanie Studenski, a geriatrician at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center told [Discovery News](#). "We are not saying that if you just go out and walk faster, you will live longer. Absolutely not. We are saying your body selects a walking speed that is best for you based on the health of all your body systems."

Fair enough. But couldn't you argue the obvious? Seniors with the highest death risk (and a walking rate less than 1.3 feet per second over 13 feet) were merely less healthy than the fast performer group. The researchers contend that yes, you could, and they would, in fact, agree with your argument. The increased death risk could easily come from ailments such as

Parkinson's or severe vascular diseases, both of which could lead to a slower walking speed, not to mention a shorter life span. Researchers told [Boston.com](#) that the blurred causality is an integral part of their research, since focusing on gait speed could help assess vitality "because it integrates known and unrecognized disturbances in multiple organ systems".

In short, a simple walking test could possibly better aid doctors when choosing to perform, or not perform, certain screening tests on patients. According to Seth Landefeld, director of the University of California, San Francisco Mt. Zion Center on Aging, this could be especially helpful in screening for cancer and heart disease, the tests for which are only helpful in people who are going to live for another five to ten years, [Discovery News](#) reports.

In speaking to [Boston.com](#), Dr. Farzaneh Sorond, a stroke neurologist who studies gait speed in the elderly cautions that the science behind slowing gait speed is highly complex, meaning hitting the treadmill and punishing yourself to increase speed will not be the easy solution to extend your years. Another caveat: Studenski told [ABC News](#) that longevity charts are not necessarily the best predictors for pro-strollers; some healthy people simply have a preference for moving at a leisurely pace. Landefeld files the study under further support of the "use it or lose it" philosophy, adding, "If you keep walking and moving around, that will likely have benefits in terms of survival and overall health."

In this case, slow and steady will suffice to win the race.

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