More Physical Activity Tied to Lower Fatty Liver Disease Mortality

Exercising for a longer period of time was especially linked to a reduced risk of death from cardiovascular conditions.

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Physical activity levels were found to impact the likelihood of death from any cause in people with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), according to a study published in Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology.

Arising from the accumulation of fat in the liver, NAFLD and its more severe form, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), are responsible for a growing proportion of advanced liver disease worldwide. As a result of inflammation, NAFLD can lead to the buildup of scar tissue (fibrosis), cirrhosis (advanced scarring) and even liver cancer. With no effective approved medical therapies, disease management is dependent on lifestyle changes such as weight loss and exercise.

“Physical activity is a key component of lifestyle modification and is routinely recommended for individuals with NAFLD, alongside dietary consultation to facilitate weight loss and changes in body composition,” study author Donghee Kim, MD, PhD, of Stanford University School of Medicine, and colleagues wrote.

In order to investigate links between physical activity and death from NAFLD or other causes, the team tracked exercise levels with the help of an accelerometer.

Using data from the 2003 to 2006 U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey of adults over age 20, they carried out a longitudinal study. They also assessed mortality data through December 2015 for the 5,207 participants included in the study.

Over a seven-day period, they observed participants who wore accelerometers for 10 hours each day for a minimum of four days. These data were classified according to total physical activity, moderate to vigorous physical activity and sedentary behavior.

After following the participants for around 10.6 years, the team found that increasing the total amount of physical activity as well as the amount of moderate to vigorous activity was associated with a lower risk of death from any cause in people with NAFLD. Additionally, a longer duration of total physical activity lowered the likelihood of death from cardiovascular disease in people with

NAFLD. No such associations were found for cancer-related death in individuals with NAFLD. However, an increase in sedentary behavior did not affect all-cause or cause-specific mortality risk in people with NAFLD.

“This population-based study suggests that increasing physical activity has beneficial survival effects on all-cause and cardiovascular disease–related mortality in individuals with NAFLD,” the researchers concluded. “These data suggest that recommendations to increase PA [physical activity] in patients with NAFLD should be explored as a potential treatment strategy.”

Click here to see the study abstract in Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology.

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