

Original Investigation

Effect of Structured Physical Activity on Prevention of Major Mobility Disability in Older Adults

The LIFE Study Randomized Clinical Trial

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IMPORTANCE In older adults reduced mobility is common and is an independent risk factor for morbidity, hospitalization, disability, and mortality. Limited evidence suggests that physical activity may help prevent mobility disability; however, there are no definitive clinical trials examining whether physical activity prevents or delays mobility disability.

OBJECTIVE To test the hypothesis that a long-term structured physical activity program is more effective than a health education program (also referred to as a successful aging program) in reducing the risk of major mobility disability.

DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS The Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) study was a multicenter, randomized trial that enrolled participants between February 2010 and December 2011, who participated for an average of 2.6 years. Follow-up ended in December 2013. Outcome assessors were blinded to the intervention assignment. Participants were recruited from urban, suburban, and rural communities at 8 centers throughout the United States. We randomized a volunteer sample of 1635 sedentary men and women aged 70 to 89 years who had physical limitations, defined as a score on the Short Physical Performance Battery of 9 or below, but were able to walk 400 m.

INTERVENTIONS Participants were randomized to a structured, moderate-intensity physical activity program (n = 818) conducted in a center (twice/wk) and at home (3-4 times/wk) that included aerobic, resistance, and flexibility training activities or to a health education program (n = 817) consisting of workshops on topics relevant to older adults and upper extremity stretching exercises.

MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES The primary outcome was major mobility disability objectively defined by loss of ability to walk 400 m.

RESULTS Incident major mobility disability occurred in 30.1% (246 participants) of the physical activity group and 35.5% (290 participants) of the health education group (hazard ratio [HR], 0.82 [95% CI, 0.69-0.98], $P = .03$). Persistent mobility disability was experienced by 120 participants (14.7%) in the physical activity group and 162 participants (19.8%) in the health education group (HR, 0.72 [95% CI, 0.57-0.91]; $P = .006$). Serious adverse events were reported by 404 participants (49.4%) in the physical activity group and 373 participants (45.7%) in the health education group (risk ratio, 1.08 [95% CI, 0.98-1.20]).

CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE A structured, moderate-intensity physical activity program compared with a health education program reduced major mobility disability over 2.6 years among older adults at risk for disability. These findings suggest mobility benefit from such a program in vulnerable older adults.

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The life expectancy of older Americans continues to increase, with persons 65 years or older representing the fastest growing segment of the US population.¹ Although prolongation of life remains an important public health goal, of even greater significance is the preservation of the capacity to live independently and to function well during late life.² Identification of proven interventions to prevent disability is an important public health challenge.³

Mobility—the ability to walk without assistance—is a critical characteristic for functioning independently.^{4,5} Those who lose mobility have higher rates of morbidity, disability, and mortality⁶⁻¹³ and yet are often excluded from clinical trials. Preserving the ability to walk 400 m, an excellent proxy for community ambulation, is central to maintaining a high quality of life and independence in the community.

To our knowledge, no trial has conclusively tested that physical activity can prevent or delay the onset of mobility disability over an extended follow-up. Therefore, we conducted the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) pilot study from 2004 to 2006 to plan for the phase 3 randomized trial.¹⁴ As hypothesized, the LIFE pilot study (N = 424) showed significant improvements in walking speed and physical performance measures. The pilot was not powered for a disability end point, but showed a nonsignificant reduction in risk of major mobility disability in the physical activity group compared with the health education group (also referred to as the successful aging group). In the LIFE study, we hypothesized that a long-term structured physical activity program would reduce the risk of major mobility disability compared with a health education program.

Methods

Trial Design and Participants

The study protocol was approved by the institutional review boards at all participating sites. Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants. The trial was monitored by a data and safety monitoring board appointed by the National Institute on Aging. The LIFE study was a multicenter, single-blind, parallel randomized trial conducted at 8 centers across the United States (University of Florida, Gainesville and Jacksonville, Florida; Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois; Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Stanford University, Stanford, California; Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts; Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut) between February 2010 and December 2013. The Administrative Coordinating Center was located at the University of Florida and the Data Management, Analysis, and Quality Control Center at Wake Forest School of Medicine. The centers included rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Details of the methods were published previously.¹⁵ Briefly, the eligibility criteria consisted of men and women aged 70 to 89 years who (1) were sedentary (reporting <20 min/wk of performing regular physical activity in the past month and <125

min/wk of moderate physical activity); (2) were at high risk for mobility disability based on lower extremity functional limitations measured by the Short Physical Performance Battery (SPPB)¹⁶ with a score of 9 or lower out of 12 (45% of participants were targeted to have a score <8); (3) could walk 400 m in less than 15 minutes without sitting, leaning, or the help of another person or walker; (4) had no major cognitive impairment (measured by the Modified Mini-Mental State Examination¹⁷ [3MSE] with a score of no more than 1.5 standard deviations below education- and race-specific norms); and (4) could safely participate in the intervention as determined by medical history, physical examination, and resting electrocardiography. Persons with 9 or more years of education who scored less than 80 (<76 if African American) and those with less than 9 years of education who scored less than 76 (<70 if African American or Spanish speaking) on the 3MSE were excluded.

Targeted mass mailings to the community was the primary recruitment strategy.¹⁸

Randomization

Participants were randomized to a physical activity group or to a health education program group (Figure 1) via a secure, web-based data management system using a permuted block algorithm (with random block lengths) stratified by field center and sex. Both groups received an initial individual 45-minute face-to-face introductory session by a health educator who described the intervention, communicated expectations, and answered questions.

Interventions

The physical activity intervention involved walking, with a goal of 150 min/wk, strength, flexibility, and balance training.¹⁵ The intervention included attendance at 2 center-based visits per week and home-based activity 3 to 4 times per week for the duration of the study. A protocol was in place to restart the intervention for the participants who suspended the physical activity for medical reasons. The physical activity sessions were individualized and progressed toward a goal of 30 minutes of walking daily at moderate intensity, 10 minutes of primarily lower extremity strength training by means of ankle weights (2 sets of 10 repetitions), 10 minutes of balance training, and large muscle group flexibility exercises. The participants began with lighter intensity and gradually increased intensity over the first 2 to 3 weeks of the intervention. The Borg scale of self-perceived exertion,¹⁹ which ranges from 6 to 20, was used to measure intensity of activity. Participants were asked to walk at an intensity of 13 (activity perception “somewhat hard”), and lower extremity strengthening exercises were performed at an intensity of 15 to 16.

The health education program focused on successful aging (termed *the successful aging group* in previous publications). The health education group attended weekly workshops of health education during the first 26 weeks, and then monthly sessions thereafter (bimonthly attendance was optional). Workshops included topics relevant to older adults, such as how to effectively negotiate the health care system, how to travel safely, preventive services and screenings rec-

ommended at different ages, where to go for reliable health information, nutrition, etc. The workshops did not include any physical activity topics. The program also included a 5- to 10-minute instructor-led program of gentle upper extremity stretching or flexibility exercises.

Measurements

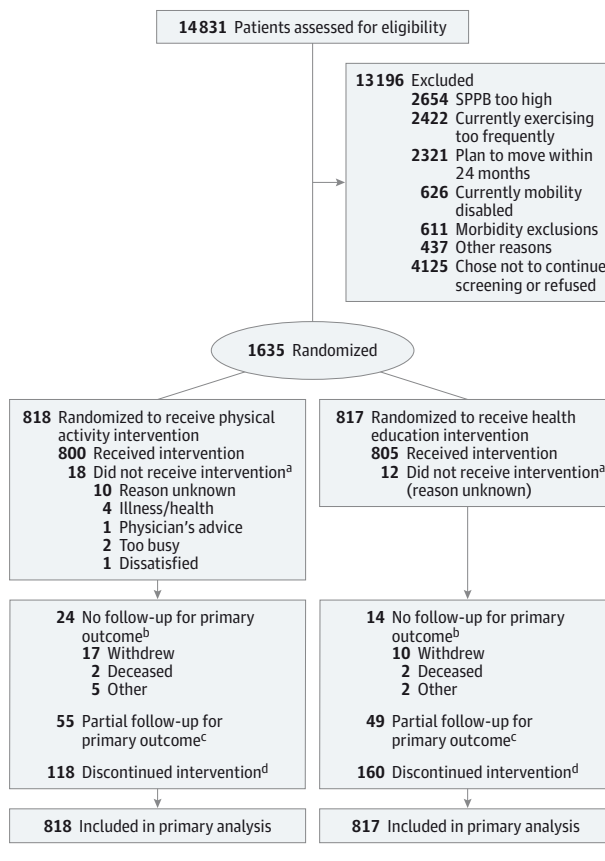
Participants were assessed every 6 months at clinic visits. Home, telephone, and proxy assessments were attempted if the participants could not come to the clinic. The assessment staff was blinded to the intervention and remained separate from the intervention team. Participants were asked not to disclose their assigned group and not to talk about their interventions during the assessment. Self-reported physical activity was ascertained by a separate set of unblinded assessors.

The main baseline assessments included self-reported demographic and contact information, medical and hospitalization history, medication inventory, electrocardiography, physical examination, Quality of Well-Being questionnaire,²⁰ health care utilization, physical activity assessed with the Community Healthy Activities Model Program for Seniors (CHAMPS) questionnaire,²¹ and with accelerometry over 7-day periods (Actigraph Inc), cognitive testing, 400-m walk test,²² the SPPB, body weight, blood pressure, and pulse rate. These measures were repeated during follow-up at varied intervals. Details of these measures and their frequency are described elsewhere.¹⁵ The SPPB consisted of 4-m walk at usual pace, a timed repeated chair stand, and 3 increasingly difficult standing balance tests.^{16,23} Each measure was assigned a categorical score ranging from 0 (inability to complete the test) to 4 (best performance). A summary score ranging from 0 (worst performers) to 12 (best performers) was calculated by summing the 3 component scores. Race and ethnicity were reported by the participants and were collected according to National Institutes of Health requirements. To minimize reporting bias, adverse events originating from the blinded assessments are presented.

Outcome Assessment

The primary outcome of major mobility disability was defined as the inability to complete a 400-m walk test within 15 minutes without sitting and without the help of another person or walker.¹⁵ Use of a cane was acceptable. Participants were asked to walk 400 m at their usual pace, without overexerting, on a 20-m course for 10 laps (40 m/lap). Participants were allowed to stop for up to 1 minute for fatigue or related symptoms. When major mobility disability could not be objectively measured because of the inability of the participant to come to the clinic and absence of a suitable walking course at the participant's home, institution, or hospital, an alternative adjudication of the outcome was based on objective inability to walk 4 m in less than 10 seconds, or self-, proxy-, or medical record-reported inability to walk across a room. If participants met these alternative criteria, they would not be able to complete the 400-m walk within 15 minutes. Reports of death were tracked through regular surveillance. Two consecutive

Figure 1. Flow of Participants Through the Study



SPPB indicates Short Physical Performance Battery.

^a Participants who did not receive the allocated intervention (ie, attended no intervention sessions).

^b For participants who did not have any major mobility disability assessments, we assigned 1 hour of follow-up time, because we knew that they were able to do the 400-m walk at baseline.

^c Partial follow-up indicates participants who had censoring times prior to the last planned follow-up visit.

^d Discontinuation of the intervention was operationalized as participants who did not attend at least 1 intervention session during their last 6 months of follow-up prior to the last planned follow-up visit date. Deaths and intervention withdrawals are included in these numbers. As an example, a participant may have discontinued the intervention in the initial 6 months of follow-up due to illness and then died prior to the 6-month assessment for the primary outcome. This participant would be reflected as missing the primary outcome due to death and also discontinuing the intervention.

major mobility disability assessments or major mobility disability followed by death defined persistent mobility disability. Censoring was defined at the time of the last definitive assessment for major mobility disability.

At each contact, participants (or proxies, if the participant was not available) were questioned about outcomes and hospitalizations since the last visit. All records for hospitalizations were obtained and outcomes were reviewed and adjudicated independently by 2 experts who were blinded to the group randomization. If the 2 reviewers disagreed, the information was forwarded to the adjudication committee and a determination was made by consensus.

Statistical Considerations

Power calculations for the primary outcome, time until the first postrandomization occurrence of major mobility disability, were based on a log-rank test with a 2-sided, .05 significance level. Based on the LIFE pilot study,¹⁴ the annual incidence rate of major mobility disability in the health education group was assumed to increase from 18% in the first year to 21% after 2 years. We further assumed that recruitment would be uniform over 21 months, follow-up would average 31 months, and loss to follow-up would be 8% per year. Under these assumptions, randomization of 1600 participants provides 80% power to detect a 21% reduction, and 90% power to detect a 24% reduction in the hazard for major mobility disability in the physical activity participants. These effect-size targets were determined based on consistency with effects derived from observational research, the LIFE pilot experience, clinical relevance (around 20% reduction), and available funding resources.

Baseline characteristics were summarized by intervention group using mean and standard deviation, or percentages. Intervention adherence was calculated as the percentage of scheduled intervention sessions attended by participants. Self-reported minutes of activity and minutes spent in activity associated with more than 760 counts/min (by accelerometry)²⁴ were analyzed using mixed-effects analysis of covariance models for repeatedly measured outcomes with an unstructured parameterization for longitudinal covariance. Models contained the following terms: field center and sex (both used to stratify randomization), baseline value of the relevant physical activity measure, intervention, clinic visit, and intervention-by-visit interaction. Least squares means were obtained from these models and contrasts were used to estimate the average effects (95% CI) over the follow-up period. Risk ratios (95% CI) were calculated to determine the relative effect of the intervention on the proportion of participants reporting adverse effects. A test of equality of the risk ratios for hospitalization between baseline subgroups defined by SPPB levels (<8 vs ≥8) was performed using Poisson regression.

The effect of the intervention on the primary outcome (ie, time until the initial ascertainment of major mobility disability) was tested based on a 2-tailed significance of .05 using the intention-to-treat approach in which participants are grouped according to randomization assignment. To compare interventions, we used a likelihood ratio test from a Cox regression model, stratified by field center and sex. Failure time was measured from the time of randomization; follow-up was censored at the last successfully completed 400-m walk test. For participants who did not have any outcome assessments, we assigned 1 hour of follow-up time, because we knew that they completed the 400-m walk at baseline. An assessment for non-proportionality of hazards was made with the addition of the interaction between log (time) and intervention.²⁵ Interaction terms were entered into these Cox models and likelihood ratio tests were used to assess the consistency of the intervention effect across levels of baseline subgroups (ethnicity/race, sex, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, walking speed, and physical performance). The secondary end points were

analyzed using the same approach as used for the primary outcome.

Sensitivity analyses were performed to investigate the effect of loss to follow-up on major mobility disability. These analyses used stabilized inverse probability weights that were a function of baseline covariates hypothesized to be predictive of loss-to-follow-up (ie, sex, race/ethnicity, age [≥80], history of diabetes, gait speed <0.8 m/s, low SPPB score [<8], 3MSE <90, clinical site, and living alone [yes/no]) and follow-up gait speed and SPPB scores to explore how the estimated hazard ratios and CIs may have been altered under these missing data assumptions. Statistical analyses were performed in SAS (SAS Institute), version 9.3, and R (Institute for Statistics and Mathematics).²⁶

Results

Study Participants

From February 2010 to December 2011, we screened 14 831 participants; of these, 1635 were eligible and randomized (818 to the physical activity group and 817 to the health education group; Figure 1). Details regarding screening, recruitment yields, and baseline characteristics have been published.¹⁸ Baseline characteristics were similar in the 2 groups (Table 1). The mean age was 78.9 years, 67.2% were women, 17.6% were African American, the average body mass index (calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared) was 30.2, and the average SPPB score was 7.4. The mean follow-up for any contact (including telephone) was 2.6 years (median, 2.7 years; interquartile range [IQR], 2.3-3.1 years). The trial ended in December 2013, as planned in the study protocol.

Intervention Adherence

The physical activity group attended 63% of the scheduled sessions after excluding medical leave (SD, 27%; median [IQR], 71% [50%-83%]). A total of 479 participants (58.6%) went on medical leave at least once and 210 participants (25.7%) went more than once. The mean duration of medical leave was 135 days (SD, 203 days; median [IQR], 49 days [21-140]). Health education participants attended 73 of the scheduled sessions (SD, 25%; median [IQR], 82% [63%-90%]). Based on CHAMPS questionnaires, through the 24-month follow-up visit (the minimum planned intervention duration for all participants), the physical activity group maintained an average of 218 min/wk (95% CI, 210-227; average change from baseline, 138 minutes [95% CI, 129-146]) in walking and weight training activities, whereas the health education group maintained an average of 115 min/wk (95% CI, 106-123; average change from baseline, 34 minutes [95% CI, 24-42]; Figure 2). Thus, the physical activity intervention maintained a 104-minute difference (95% CI, 92-116; $P < .001$) in walking and weight training activities compared with the health education group during the initial 2 years in which all participants were followed up.

Based on accelerometry using a definition of more than 760 counts/min for moderate activity,²⁴ through follow-up,

on average, the physical activity group participated in 213 min/wk (95% CI, 205 to 221; average change from baseline, 15 minutes [95% CI, 7 to 23]) of moderate activity. The health education group maintained 173 min/wk (95% CI, 165 to 181; average change from baseline, -25 minutes [95% CI, -33 to -17]; Figure 2). Thus, the physical activity intervention maintained a 40-min/wk difference (95% CI, 29 to 52; $P < .001$) in moderate physical activity assessed with accelerometry, compared with the health education group during 2 years of follow-up.

Major Mobility Disability

Data for major mobility disability were obtained for 794 participants (97.1%) in the physical activity group and 803 participants (98.3%) in the health education group. Loss to follow-up was 4.0% annually. Major mobility disability was experienced by 246 participants (30.1%) in the physical activity group and 290 participants (35.5%) in the health education group (HR, 0.82 [95% CI, 0.69-0.98]; $P = .03$; Figure 3). Of the 246 and 290 physical activity and health education participants classified with major mobility disability, 42 participants (17%) of the physical activity group and 32 participants (11%) of the health education group resulted from alternative adjudications. The sensitivity analyses exploring the effect of loss to follow-up on conclusions altered the estimates of the HR and CI limits by less than 0.016 for all analyses (eAppendix in the Supplement). Persistent mobility disability was experienced by 120 participants (14.7%) in the physical activity group and 162 participants (19.8%) in the health education group (HR, 0.72 [95% CI, 0.57-0.91]; $P = .006$). Major mobility disability or death was experienced by 264 participants (32.3%) in the physical activity group and 309 participants (37.8%) in the health education group (HR, 0.82 [95% CI, 0.70-0.97]; $P = .02$).

In prespecified subgroup analyses, results for major mobility disability did not significantly differ when participants were categorized by ethnicity/race, sex, history of cardiovascular disease, history of diabetes, baseline walking speed, and baseline physical performance (Figure 4). The subgroup with lower physical function at baseline (SPPB <8), representing 44.7% of the study population and 71% of major mobility disability events (283 of 536 total events), received considerable benefit (HR, 0.75). In post-hoc analyses, the benefit of physical activity on major mobility disability was similar in participants with a 3MSE score of less than 90 and in those with a score of 90 or higher (Figure 4).

Safety

Serious adverse events were reported by 404 participants (49.4%) in the physical activity group and 373 participants (45.7%) in the health education group (risk ratio [RR], 1.08 [95% CI, 0.98-1.20], Table 2). For inpatient hospitalizations, 396 of 818 participants (48.4%) in the physical activity group and 360 of 817 participants (44.1%) in the health education group reported an event (RR, 1.10 [95% CI, 0.99-1.22]). The reasons for hospitalization were highly heterogeneous, most of them deemed unrelated to the intervention.

Table 1. Baseline Characteristics of the Participants

| Characteristic | No. (%) ^a | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Physical Activity (n = 818) | Health Education (n = 817) |
| Age, mean (SD), y | 78.7 (5.2) | 79.1 (5.2) |
| Women | 547 (66.9) | 551 (67.4) |
| Ethnicity/race | | |
| Hispanic | 31 (3.8) | 30 (3.7) |
| White | 604 (73.8) | 635 (77.7) |
| African American | 163 (19.9) | 125 (15.3) |
| SPPB score | | |
| Mean (SD) | 7.4 (1.6) | 7.3 (1.6) |
| <8 | 353 (43.3) | 378 (46.2) |
| 400-m walking speed, mean (SD), m/s | 0.83 (0.17) | 0.82 (0.17) |
| BMI, mean (SD) | 30.1 (5.7) | 30.3 (6.2) |
| Walking/weight training activities, mean (SD), min/wk ^b | 75.1 (125.6) | 86.7 (134.5) |
| Median (IQR) | 0 (0-105) | 30 (0-105) |
| Accelerometry of moderate physical activity, mean (SD), min/wk ^c | 193.7 (155.3) | 202.1 (186.5) |
| Median (IQR) | 161 (80-257) (n = 590) | 153 (85-266) (n = 581) |
| 3MSE score, 0-100 scale, mean (SD) | 91.5 (5.5) | 91.6 (5.3) |
| Conditions, No./total (%) | | |
| Hypertension ^b | 573/813 (70.5) | 578/808 (71.5) |
| Diabetes ^b | 199/815 (24.4) | 216/813 (26.6) |
| Myocardial infarction ^b | 60/815 (7.4) | 69/812 (8.5) |
| Stroke ^b | 57/814 (7.0) | 52/814 (6.4) |
| Cancer ^b | 178/814 (21.9) | 192/815 (23.6) |
| Chronic pulmonary disease ^b | 130/815 (16.0) | 123/812 (15.2) |

Abbreviations: 3MSE, Modified Mini-Mental State Examination; BMI, body mass index (calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared); SPPB, Short Physical Performance Battery.

^a Some values may slightly differ from those previously published¹⁸ due to data updates.

^b Self-reported.

^c Moderate physical activity was defined for accelerometry based on the 760 counts/min cut point.²⁴

Among those with SPPB score lower than 8, the RR was 1.04 (95% CI, 0.90-1.20); and among those with SPPB score of 8 or higher, the RR was 1.17 (95% CI, 1.00-1.36). The test of equality of RRs for hospitalization for physical activity vs health education between the 2 baseline SPPB subgroups was not significant ($P = .44$).

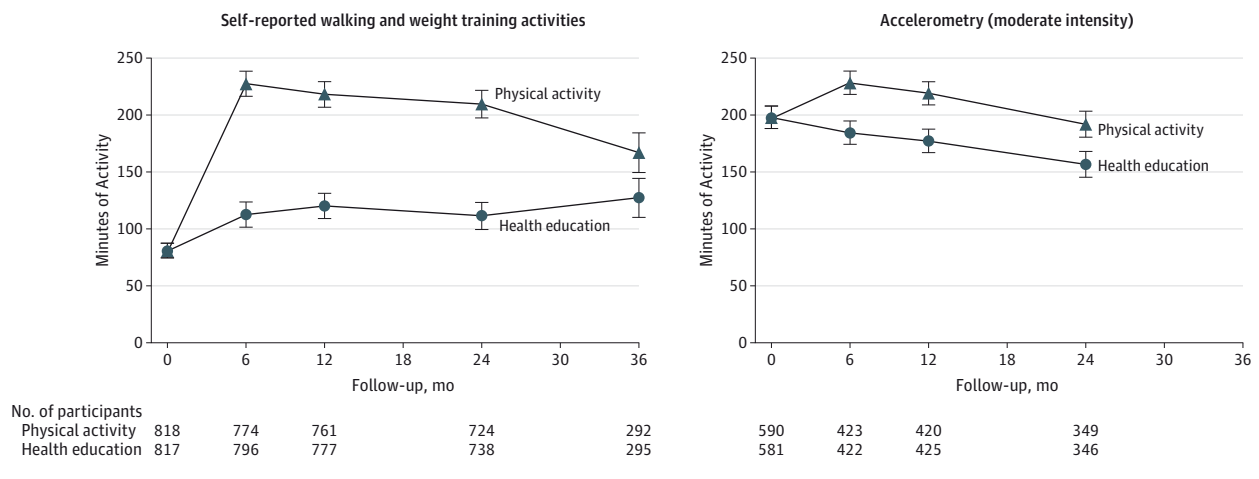
Discussion

The LIFE study showed that, over 2.6 years of follow-up, the physical activity intervention compared with the health education intervention significantly reduced major mobility disability (HR, 0.82; $P = .03$), persistent mobility disability (HR, 0.72; $P = .006$), and the combined outcome of major mobility disability or death (HR, 0.82; $P = .02$). The subgroup with lower physical function at baseline (SPPB <8),

representing 44.7% of the study population and 71% of major mobility disability events (283 of 536 total events), received considerable benefit (HR, 0.81). These results suggest the potential for structured physical activity as a feasible and effective intervention to reduce the burden of disability among vulnerable older persons, in spite of functional decline in late life. To our knowledge, the LIFE study is the largest and longest duration randomized trial of physical activity in older persons.

The LIFE study has important strengths, including the objectively measured primary outcome of major mobility disability that is a reliable,²² well-validated, and important clinical and public health outcome in older people.¹¹ Participants at high risk for disability were recruited from 8 field centers spanning the United States, including urban, suburban, and rural settings, and included a high proportion of older adults from African American and Hispanic backgrounds. Although highly prevalent and increasing in size,

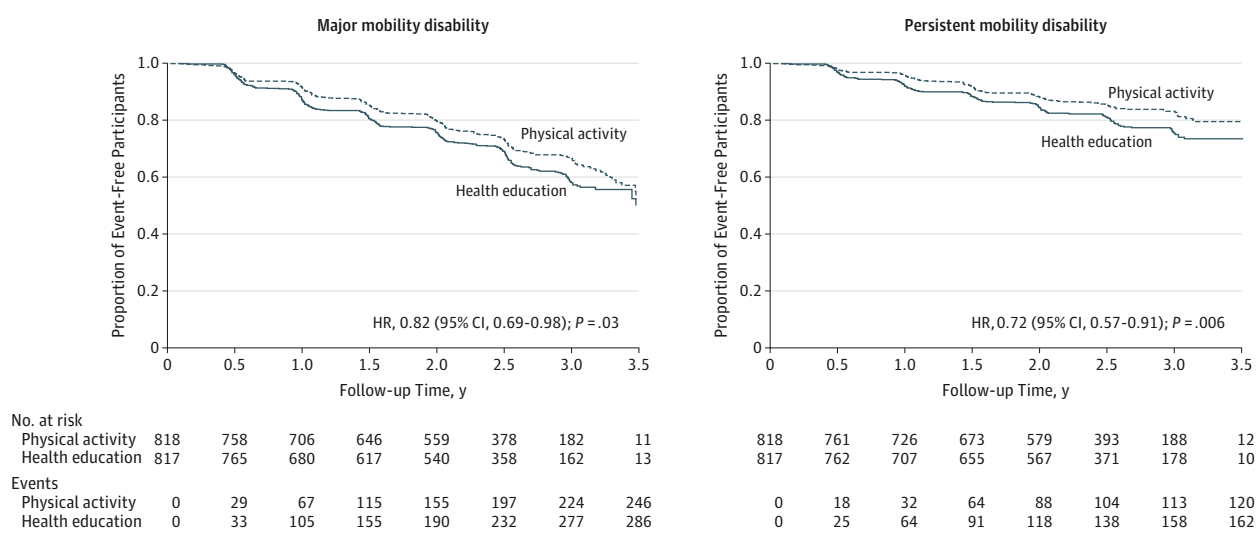
Figure 2. Self-reported and Accelerometry-Derived Physical Activity by Treatment Group



Plotted values represent least squares means (95% CI) from a mixed-effects model adjusting for clinical site and sex (both used to stratify randomization) and the baseline self-reported walking/weight training activities or accelerometry counts. In addition to the above-mentioned terms, the model contained a term for the intervention group, follow-up clinic visit, and the intervention × visit interaction. All participants had expected follow-up through 24 months and approximately 47% of randomized participants had expected

visits at 36 months. Accelerometry data were not collected at the 36-month visit. Baseline values represent the overall mean of both groups combined (a standard practice when using the analysis of covariance method): this is the assumed value for both groups when obtaining least squares means at follow-up using mixed-effects analysis of covariance. The baseline, prerandomization value is reflected by follow-up time 0. The *P* value is less than .001 for the average intervention effect.

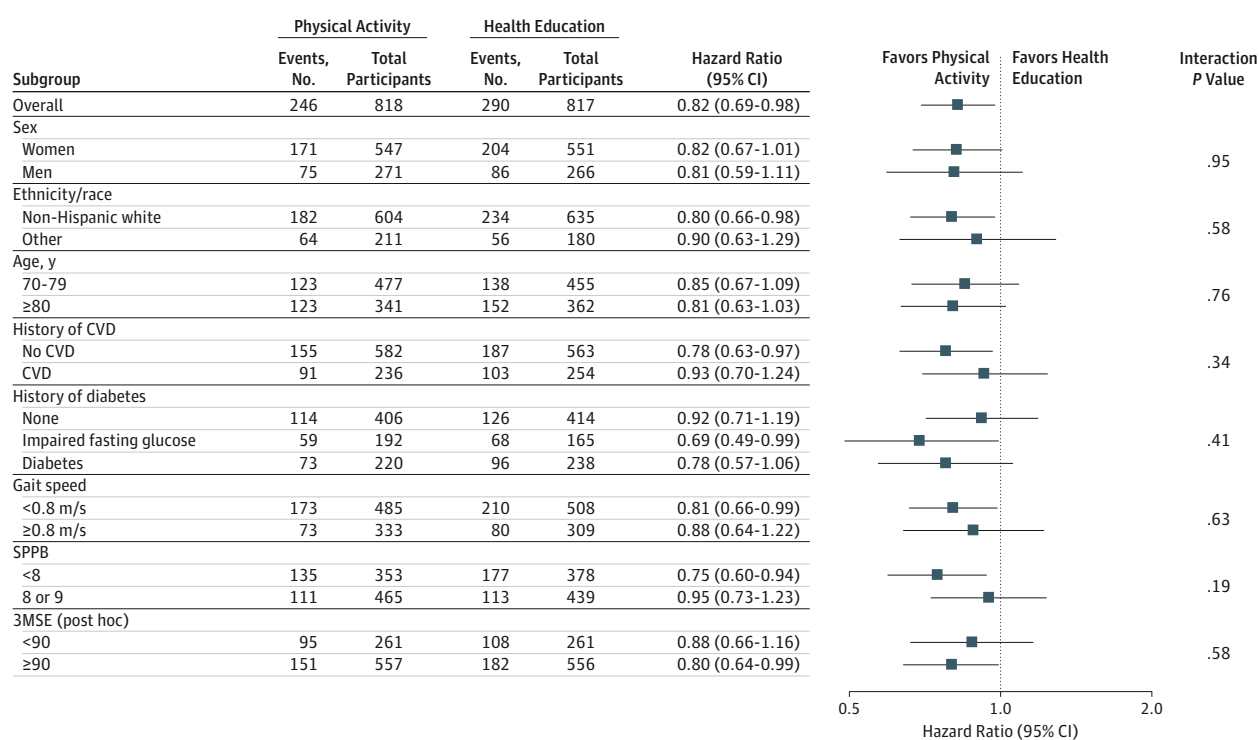
Figure 3. Effect of a Moderate Physical Activity Intervention on the Onset of Major Mobility Disability and Persistent Mobility Disability



HR indicates hazard ratio. The graph for major mobility disability was truncated at 3.5 years and the health education group had 4 additional failures between 3.5 and 3.6 years of follow-up. Number of events represents cumulative events

and adjusted HRs and *P* values are from proportional hazards regression models defined in the Methods section.

Figure 4. Hazard Ratio of Major Mobility Disability for Physical Activity vs Health Education According to Subgroups



3MSE indicates Modified Mini-Mental State Examination; CVD, cardiovascular disease; SPPB, Short Physical Performance Battery. *P* values were obtained from likelihood ratios tests of the interaction terms added to the Cox regression model.

the older, more vulnerable population has been understudied and typically is not included in large randomized trials. Retention throughout the follow-up was excellent. The adherence rates to the physical activity intervention were similar or higher than those achieved in other much shorter studies involving older adults.²⁷⁻²⁹ The physical activity program was likely successful in part because of the adherence and lifestyle motivation procedures.³⁰ The participants were reimbursed for their transportation costs, which added to the cost of the intervention, but likely contributed to the high levels of attendance. According to initial cost data collected in the LIFE study, the physical activity intervention cost, including transportation, was approximately \$4900 per participant over the 2.6 years of average participation (\$1815/year). The physical activity intervention was designed to be simple for widespread implementation in a variety of communities and settings, because it does not require any special equipment.

The LIFE study has limitations. We could not ascertain whether participants who were excluded because of their high level of physical function or severe cognitive deficits would also benefit from physical activity. The participants were recruited from the community, but may have been self-referred, so they may not be fully representative of all people in the community. The average follow-up duration of 2.6 years was relatively short vs the estimated average 9-year life expectancy of the LIFE cohort.³¹ Ideally, it would be useful to assess the effect of the intervention on the quality of the remain-

ing years of life. The study, which was powered based on assumptions of 21% to 24% risk reduction, achieved an HR of 0.82 and an absolute risk difference of 5.4%. Although the effect size was slightly lower than planned, we believe that it is clinically relevant given the major health effect of mobility disability and the lack of proven interventions to avert mobility disability in vulnerable older populations. In addition, persistent mobility disability was significantly reduced by a larger degree in the physical activity group (HR, 0.72), indicating that physical activity not only prevents the onset of major mobility disability, but also favors improved recovery in those who lose mobility.

Based on observational cohorts,³² we expected a lower hospitalization rate in the physical activity group. In the LIFE study, physical activity did not decrease the hospitalizations rate. We found a higher rate of hospitalizations in the physical activity group that did not reach statistical significance. The hospitalizations comprised a range of heterogeneous diagnoses mostly deemed unrelated to the intervention. Our finding may have several explanations. First, physical activity may unmask symptoms resulting in earlier detection of underlying medical conditions. For example, sedentary older persons with subclinical left ventricular dysfunction may observe heart failure symptoms when they start moderate physical activity. Second, the physical activity group's more frequent contact and testing of vital signs at each intervention session may have led to a higher rate of recognition of health events. Third, the stress of exercise in

Table 2. All Deaths and Number of Participants Reporting Adverse Events at Blinded Assessments

| Event Type | Physical Activity Group (n = 818) | | Health Education Group (n = 817) | | Risk Ratio (95% CI) ^a |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Participants, No. (%) | Events, No. | Participants, No. (%) | Events, No. | |
| Serious adverse events | | | | | |
| All serious adverse events | 404 (49.4) | 879 | 373 (45.7) | 774 | 1.08 (0.98-1.20) |
| Death | 48 (5.9) | 48 | 42 (5.1) | 42 | 1.14 (0.76-1.71) |
| Life-threatening event | 11 (1.3) | 11 | 8 (1.0) | 8 | 1.37 (0.56-3.40) |
| Persistent disability/incapacity | 33 (4.0) | 51 | 26 (3.2) | 45 | 1.27 (0.77-2.10) |
| All inpatient hospitalizations | 396 (48.4) | 777 | 360 (44.1) | 681 | 1.10 (0.99-1.22) |
| Any other serious events | 7 (0.9) | 8 | 8 (1.0) | 10 | 0.87 (0.32-2.40) |
| Most frequent hospitalization diagnoses | | | | | |
| Infection | 74 (9.0) | 95 | 57 (7.0) | 68 | 1.30 (0.93-1.81) |
| Surgical procedure | 68 (8.3) | 76 | 73 (8.9) | 84 | 0.93 (0.68-1.28) |
| Fall, syncope, dizziness, vertigo | 54 (6.4) | 58 | 53 (6.5) | 62 | 1.02 (0.71-1.49) |
| Atrial fibrillation/flutter | 24 (2.9) | 28 | 20 (2.4) | 23 | 1.20 (0.67-2.15) |
| Heart failure | 18 (2.2) | 21 | 14 (1.7) | 20 | 1.28 (0.64-2.56) |
| Stroke/TIA/intracranial hemorrhage | 29 (3.5) | 33 | 28 (3.4) | 34 | 1.03 (0.62-1.72) |
| MI/chest pain/acute coronary syndrome | 33 (4.0) | 42 | 25 (3.1) | 27 | 1.32 (0.79-2.20) |
| Fracture | 27 (3.3) | 29 | 26 (3.2) | 27 | 1.04 (0.61-1.76) |
| Neoplasm | 17 (2.1) | 17 | 17 (2.1) | 20 | 1.00 (0.51-1.94) |
| Arthritis/back, neck, or bone pain | 30 (3.7) | 31 | 33 (4.0) | 35 | 0.91 (0.56-1.47) |
| Symptoms resulting in at least 1 wk of restricted activity ^b | | | | | |
| All cases | 198 (24.2) | 253 | 198 (24.2) | 249 | 1.00 (0.84-1.19) |
| Fall | 47 (5.7) | 53 | 71 (8.7) | 81 | 0.66 (0.46-0.94) |
| Fatigue | 38 (4.6) | 46 | 41 (5.0) | 45 | 0.93 (0.60-1.42) |
| Muscle or joint aching | 32 (3.9) | 37 | 40 (4.9) | 43 | 0.80 (0.51-1.26) |
| Back pain | 36 (4.4) | 41 | 33 (4.0) | 35 | 1.09 (0.69-1.73) |
| Muscle or joint stiffness | 26 (3.2) | 30 | 33 (4.0) | 35 | 0.79 (0.48-1.30) |
| Foot pain | 17 (2.1) | 17 | 18 (2.2) | 18 | 0.94 (0.49-1.82) |
| Dizziness | 18 (2.2) | 19 | 14 (1.7) | 15 | 1.28 (0.64-2.56) |
| Shortness of breath | 15 (1.8) | 16 | 20 (2.4) | 22 | 0.75 (0.39-1.45) |
| Fainting | 16 (2.0) | 18 | 10 (1.2) | 11 | 1.60 (0.73-3.50) |
| Abnormal heart rhythm | 9 (1.1) | 9 | 8 (1.0) | 8 | 1.12 (0.44-2.90) |
| Other symptom | 84 (10.3) | 96 | 71 (8.7) | 75 | 1.18 (0.87-1.60) |

Abbreviations: MI, myocardial infarction; TIA, transient ischemic attack.

^a Risk ratio compares the proportion of participants reporting any events in the physical activity group vs the health education group, with asymptomatic 95% CIs.

^b Symptoms resulting in at least 1 week of restricted activity may also lead to serious adverse events. Thus, events reported in this section of Table 2 may also be reflected as serious adverse events or hospitalizations.

the context of lowered homeostatic reserve in vulnerable participants³³ may have led to a higher risk of adverse events. However, our data do not support this explanation. The hospitalization results were not significantly different among those with SPPB score less than 8, and those with a score 8 or 9. Finally, there may be no causal association between physical activity and hospitalizations.

Physical activity did not decrease the death rate. We found a higher rate of mortality in the physical activity group that did not reach statistical significance, and which was compatible with benefit or harm of physical activity (Table 2). Given the small number of events the data regarding mortality are in-

conclusive. Further studies are needed to assess the effects of physical activity on mortality and hospitalizations in vulnerable older adults.

Conclusions

A structured moderate-intensity physical activity program compared with a health education program reduced major mobility disability over 2.6 years among older adults at risk of disability. These findings suggest mobility benefit from such a program in vulnerable older adults.

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