

# An active cultural life helps people live longer

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## Summary

This paper examined data from a survey from the 1970s in Finland which followed a nationally representative sample of adults (aged 30+) over a 20 year period. It found that participation in cultural activities leads to a longer life, this is especially true for men.

## Culture is a component of leisure

The survey collected data about the range and amount of cultural participation and attendance for a variety of activities (including visiting the theatre or art exhibitions, reading books or listening to recorded music, singing or painting etc.) but also hiking and church attendance. All of this was combined to give each respondent an overall leisure score.

## Cultural engagement does affect mortality

In addition to demographic and lifestyle data a vast array of health data were collected about the subjects through tests and examinations (not solely relying on what the subjects reported about their own health). The authors are able to assert that 'people who are actively engaged in clubs, voluntary societies, hobbies or in cultural, recreational and civic activities seem to live longer than people with moderate leisure participation, and people with no or little leisure participation live the shortest life. Conventional health-related risk factors do not explain these associations.' This was true even after leisure activities

involving physical exertion (such as hiking or hunting) were removed from the analysis.

## Culture still matters when other lifestyle factors are taken into account

When looking at the relationship between leisure and mortality the researchers controlled for all the common factors that predict likelihood of mortality (including education and socio-economic status, physical health and lifestyle) using a standard and validated technique in the medical sciences.

### Keywords

**survival** **Finland** **lifestyle** **population** **leisure** **longevity** **survey** **health**  
**mortality**

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