



Osteoarthritis, lack of walking, linked to death risk

Physical inactivity may be the reason why people with osteoarthritis are at an increased risk of death, a new study suggests. The results appeared in Medical news Today.

A study appearing in the journal **RMD Open** has demonstrated that people who have osteoarthritis (OA) are more likely than other people to die prematurely.

When the researchers behind the study considered what preventable factors might be contributing to this, they found that lack of regular walking was a key issue.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States, OA is a type of arthritis that mainly affects the joints of a person's hips, hands, and knees.

OA develops when the cartilage between bone joints wears down, which then affects the bones themselves.

Support needed to stay mobile

The typical symptoms of OA are pain, aching, stiffness, and swelling in the affected joints, which can make it difficult for a person to stay mobile without significant support.

There is no cure for OA, so treatment typically focuses on relieving symptoms and increasing a person's quality of life.

According to the CDC, OA affects more than 32.5-million adults in the US.

Previous research has identified a link between OA and mortality. However, experts do not fully understand the precise mechanisms behind this link.

The authors of the recent study set out to gain a better understanding of these mechanisms, with the hope that the information would help clinicians better support people with OA and reduce their risk of mortality.

Large sample size

The study took place over 10 years, during which the researchers monitored more than 10,000 people over the age of 50 years who had OA.

The team used a variety of statistical methods to consider other confounding factors that might also affect a person's mortality.

After doing this, the authors found that people with OA have an 11% greater risk of premature death than those without the condition.

Based on previous research, the authors then looked at factors that may affect this increased risk of death: walking, depression and anxiety, and unrefreshed sleep.

Although unrefreshed sleep and depression and anxiety also appeared to increase the chances of death, the authors argued that the difference was too small to be clinically relevant.

Consequently, a key finding of the study is that clinicians should prioritize keeping people with OA active to lower their risk of death.

Major health benefits

The authors note that previous research has indicated a link between walking disabilities and mortality. Being active has major health benefits and helps the body combat various diseases that can cause death.

Interestingly, however, a significant number of the study participants reported that they were not regularly walking as far as they felt they could.

This finding suggests that there is room for clinicians to explore ways of helping people with OA to walk more within the limitations of their condition.

As the authors of the study note, "Small amounts of regular walking and getting out and about can offer protection against comorbidity, including depression and CVD [cardiovascular disease]."

Although doctors do not typically consider OA to be life threatening, the study makes it clear that a significant number of people will die because of the condition. Therefore, encouraging these individuals to walk as regularly as their health allows is a key way to combat this risk.