

# NUS Medicine study finds five factors that increase the odds of ageing well

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Those who pursue a healthier lifestyle by exercising regularly and having a plant-based diet, for instance, can raise their chances of living independently in old age, with no cognitive impairment and without severe chronic diseases like cancer.

This was among the findings of the Singaporean Chinese Health Study, involving more than 14,000

Chinese Singaporeans who were recruited at the average age of 53 and then assessed later in life on the status of their health.

Based on this data, the study found a statistically significant connection between lifestyle factors and healthy ageing.

Professor Koh Woon Puay, the senior author, said that while the study included only Chinese Singaporeans, there is no reason to believe from a biological perspective that this result should apply only to

Chinese people. More importantly, she said, the findings point to the importance of a healthy lifestyle to safeguard quality of life at a later age for all – which is crucial in an ageing society.

Prof Koh, who is from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine), said: “Although Singaporeans have one of the highest average life expectancies in the world at 84, around 10 of the years are spent in poor health.... More should

be done to ameliorate this risk to ensure a higher quality of life for the ageing population of Singapore.”

The study, conducted by a team of researchers from the Healthy Longevity Translational Research Programme at NUS Medicine, investigated the effects of five lifestyle factors on the likelihood of ageing well. Apart from exercising regularly and having a plant-based diet, the other three factors are having a healthy body mass index, not smoking and limiting alcohol intake.

After recruitment, participants were re-interviewed at an average age of 66 to assess the change in their lifestyle since recruitment.

Later, at an average age of 74, the participants were interviewed again to assess their health status – to see if they had aged healthily after all.

Prof Koh said individuals who had increased their number of healthy lifestyle factors by the average age of 66 – that is, the point of the second interview – were able to

improve their odds of ageing healthily. There was an 18 per cent improvement of odds for each successive adoption of a healthy lifestyle factor, she said.

She added: “As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure... Our study provides evidence that promoting a healthier lifestyle, even after mid-life, can reduce disease burden and maintain the quality of life for ageing Singaporeans.”

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