

These five warning signs predict you'll become frail in old age

A new study has identified five risk factors for people in their fifties that predict their likelihood of becoming frail in their seventies and beyond.

Frailty is not something you want in your future: it's marked by decreases in muscle mass, strength, endurance, balance, walking and general activity, as well as slowness and exhaustion. Per the Australian and New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine, frail older people have worse health outcomes including a heightened risk of disability and falls.

The research, published in *The Lancet Public Health*, drew on data collected from thousands of British men and women over several decades to tease out five warning signs for fifty-somethings that impact their frailty risk:

Physical activity: Staying active is super important at any age. About 3 percent of those active in their fifties become frail, compared to 6.2 percent of those inactive in their fifties.

Body mass index: Those with a BMI in the normal weight range were least likely to become frail (2.7 percent). Those underweight and overweight were more at risk (4.5 and 3.4 percent), while those with an obese BMI were most at risk (7.9 percent).

Smoking: 5.4 percent of fifty-something smokers became frail in their seventies, compared to 3.5 percent of non-smokers and 2.8 of ex-smokers. (Yep. smoking is bad for your long-term health — shocking.)

Two chemicals in the blood linked to inflammation: About 1 percent of those with the lowest levels of a chemical called interleukin-6 (IL-6) became frail, compared to 3.5 percent of those with the highest levels. The second chemical is C-reactive protein — 1.5 percent of those with the lowest levels were frail, compared with 4.1 percent of those with the highest.

"By targeting how active someone is, encouraging a healthy lifestyle and understanding more about how inflammation is linked to frailty in later life, we could improve the health of our ever-ageing population," explained University College London professor Eric Brunner, who led the study, in a statement.

"Current healthy ageing policy focuses on early prevention, mostly before someone turns 50, but our research shows that it is never too late to look after your health and improve your chances of a healthy and independent later life."

The research also uncovered other major factors linked to frailty.

Women were more than twice as likely than men to become frail, while those who lived alone also has double the likelihood of those who lived with others. Those in lower-income groups were more than three times more likely to become frail as those in higher-income groups.

"Frailty is not just an issue for later life and should not be seen as an inevitable part of getting old. This research shows that, by taking steps to ensure we are healthy going in to middle age, we can avoid getting on the path to a frail old age," said Professor Jeremy Pearson from the British Heart Foundation (BHF), which partly funded the research, in a statement.

He added that more research is needed to determined how "complicated inflammatory processes going on in the body, beyond our immediate control" impact our frailty risk.

"The least frail people in this study were ... physically active in their fifties, ate fruit and vegetables at least every day, had a normal weight, low blood pressure, low cholesterol and drank alcohol in moderation," noted BHF senior cardiac nurse Julie Ward.

"These results should be a wake-up call to people in later mid-life who think they are 'too late' to make positive changes to their health."

Adapted from: <https://coach.nine.com.au/2018/06/29/10/21/middle-age-frailty-risk>

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