

University of Cumbria Research

New research reveals Scottish country dancing can delay ageing process

New research by the University of Cumbria reveals Scottish country dancing is beneficial to the health of older women and can help to delay the ageing process. The university's Active Ageing Research Group (AARG) has published its recent findings in the 'Journal of Ageing and Physical Activity'. Researchers found that this type of physical activity can delay the ageing process in locomotion-related activities in older women and can benefit their functional ability. AARG, in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, analysed data from women aged 60-80, who had taken part in Scottish country dancing for at least ten years, and their ability to perform day-to-day tasks in comparison to non-dancers of the same age group. The 26 Scottish country dancers and 34 non-dancers, who were all healthy and participated in the same amount of physical activity each week, were assessed on a variety of tasks, such as how far they could walk in six minutes, how fast they could cover six metres, or how far they could reach towards their toes while seated. While the results showed dancers and non-dancers aged 60-70 had similar functional abilities, the analysis revealed dancers aged 70-80 performed better than their non-dancer counterparts in the various tasks.

The researchers believe that the effect of the ageing process on locomotor-related activities in Scottish country dancers can potentially be delayed due to the routines which combine forwards and sideways movements with side-skipping, turning and hopping elements – all of which combat the deterioration of the nervous system. The study states: “These findings advocate the participation in Scottish country dance in combating the inevitable degenerative effects of ageing in the performance of functional ability tasks when compared with age-matched individuals participating in other forms of physical activity.”

Dr Susan Dewhurst, lead researcher and Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Physiology, said: “With the ageing population being a major concern due to the impact on public services and particularly the NHS, promoting active ageing that will result in independent and healthy living is crucial, both for the NHS and the individual s concerned. “The present study shows that Scottish country dancing can be an appealing form of exercise to achieve that, as it not only brings the social and mental well-being of group dancing but it also helps to maintain functional ability.”

Age-related physical degeneration severely affects people's quality of life and puts a large amount of strain on the NHS. With the number of people aged 65 or over projected to rise to more than 16 million (nearly 50%) in the next 20 years, AARG is committed to finding ways which can lessen the effects of ageing, by identifying the most effective interventions of age-related degeneration and promoting them into future health schemes, as well as developing scientific research which can be translated into practical applications.

Anyone who is interested in AARG's work can email activeageing@cumbria.ac.uk

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March 2014