

Sport for elderly in the future – Between ironman and chair exercises

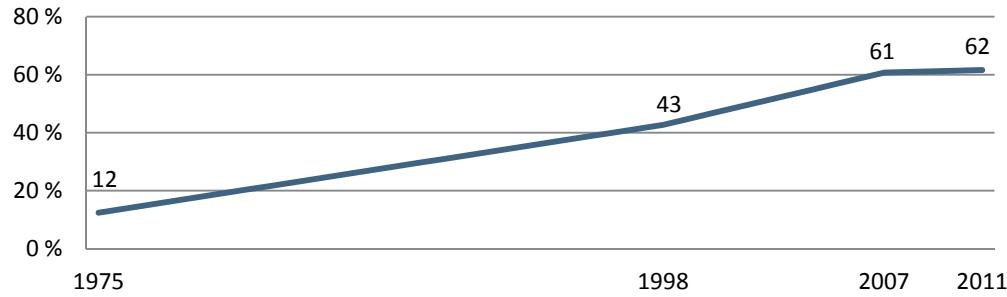
More Danish elderly than ever do sport and exercise and stay physically active even at a very high age. A Danish report looks into the physical activity trends among people over the age of 60.

The Danish population over 60 years old will grow over the coming centuries in both numbers and proportion of the population. Over the next 25 years there will be around 500,000 more Danes aged over 60 and they will go from being one fourth of the population to one third.

Looking at sport activities offered for the elderly among sports organisations is relevant for at least two reasons: 1) The increase of elderly people in the population and (2) the fact that there is a growing interest among the elderly in staying physically and mentally active by doing sports, exercise and physical activity. Many elderly people associate exercise with having a good quality of life as a senior.

Over the last decades, sports participation among the elderly has grown significantly and in 2011 62 per cent of the Danish population over 60 years old said they were doing sport or exercising regularly (figure 1). That is almost the same level as the average for all adults (64 per cent). But participation declines with increasing age, and this is particularly evident among the 75+ age group.

Figure 1: The proportion of elderly who do sport and/or exercise has increased over recent decades



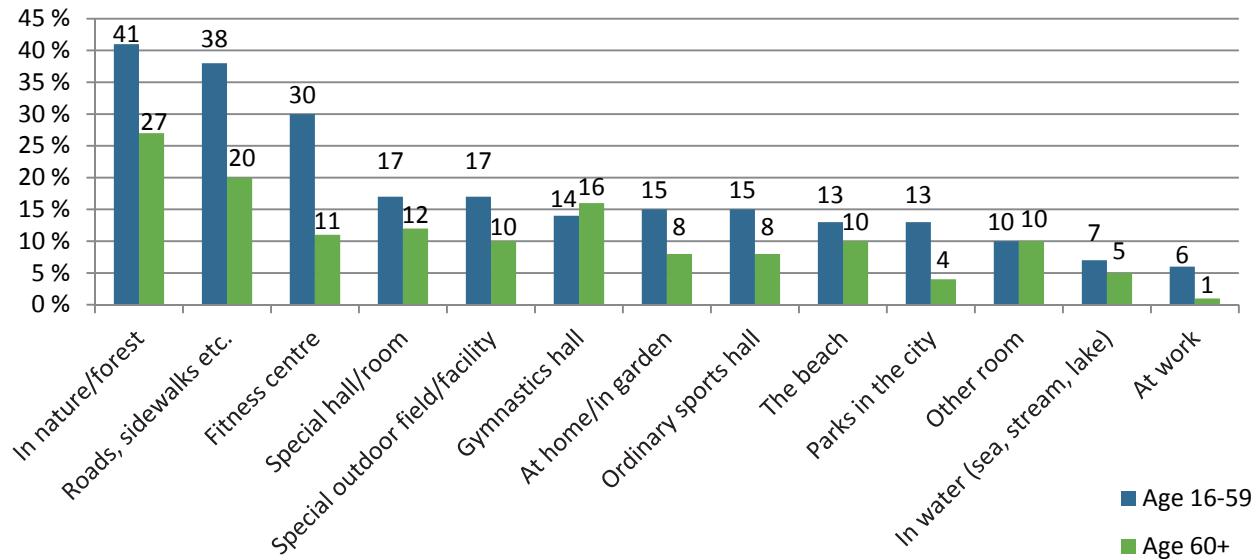
The proportion of elderly (60+ years) who say they do sport and/or exercise.

The preferred types of sport among the elderly do not differ much from the preferred sports among the other adults. Exercise-related types of sport top the list with activities such as walking/hiking, gymnastics, strength training, cycling and swimming being the most popular activities. Though there are similarities between the preferred activities among men and women, there are also differences: Women to a larger degree do exercise activities, such as gymnastics and aerobics, in groups, whereas men are more interested in competing and measuring the performance in activities like golf or cycling.

Most sport and exercise among the elderly is self-organised (47 %) or organised in clubs, where more than one third are physically active (36 %). For many elderly people clubs are an important setting for their activity and there is a high member involvement in clubs in which more than half of the members are over the age of 60. More people in these clubs attend social activities and meetings.

Regarding facilities, the elderly differ from other adult age groups as they want to be active during the day. The facilities and arenas used for sport and exercise among the elderly reflect the preferred types of activities. Outdoor arenas like the nature/forests and roads/sidewalks are mostly used by this age group (figure 2), but smaller halls and gymnastic halls and other types of smaller rooms are also used.

Figure 2: Elderly mostly do sport and exercise outdoors



Facilities/arenas used for sport and exercise among adults aged 16-59 years and elderly aged 60+ years. More than one answer was possible.

Among the inactive over 60, poor health is the main barrier for not being active. Even though there are more elderly than ever who stay active their whole life, there are still many inactive elderly people who believe they have become too old to do sport and exercise. The motivators for the many active elderly people, on the other hand, are health and social factors such as meeting other people.

Among the changes seen in the sport participation among the elderly are their increasing wishes to continue doing the activities they have always been doing. Many do not want to be offered specific 'sport activities for the elderly'. Instead, they want to do the same as all the other adults – even the younger ones. The elderly today simply do not consider themselves old to the same degree as before. Another characteristic of the group is that they are very engaged and often do volunteer work. But they only volunteer if they find the work interesting or relevant.

DGI initiatives

DGI has put a focus on the elderly and it is shaping the different activities it organises to increase people's awareness of the potential of activities for the elderly. At the same time DGI is trying to encourage clubs to be more interested in offering activities for this group. Many clubs still consider activities for the elderly as a matter for specific seniors' clubs or other suppliers of sports activities.

The report is based on results from various surveys conducted by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies. A number of interviews were also conducted with relevant organisers of sports activities for the elderly: clubs, sports organisations, fitness centres, etc. The original report in Danish ('Fremtidens senioridræt – Mellem ironman og stolemotion') can be downloaded for free at www.idan.dk

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