

# Clubbing: it's the secret to living longer

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Victorian Racing Pigeon Union president Tony Price has his hands full looking after his racing pigeons. *Photo: Simon O'Dwyer*

Clubbing – it's the secret to living longer. Whether it's a walking club, a bridge club or even a pigeon racing club like Tony Price's, research has found that those who belong to clubs have significantly reduced risks of premature death.

Australian research published in the [British Medical Journal Open](#) found that being an active member of a club or social group in retirement could be just as good for your health as doing regular exercise.

"The more clubs the better," said University of Queensland psychologist [Niklas Steffens](#). "Membership of a group or club is really good for your health."



Tony Price at home with his racing pigeons in Craigieburn. *Photo: Simon O'Dwyer*

Tony Price has up to 50 pigeons at his Craigieburn home and loves the social aspect of pigeon racing.

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The president of the [Victorian Racing Pigeon Union](#), Mr Price retired from his job at the tax office in 2014 allowing the 61-year-old to devote more time to his hobby of pigeon racing.

"Recently the club has been getting more and more retirees because it's probably the only sport you can do from your backyard," he said.



Illustration: Matt Golding

But while the hobby can be backyard-based, Mr Price said the monthly club meetings, training flights, pigeon auctions, races and phone calls to keep the club ticking over make it a very sociable pastime.

"Retirees do very well as they have time to train the birds," he said.

Dr Steffens' research found that if a person belonged to two clubs in the two years before retirement and maintained an active connection with both clubs for six years after retirement, the risk of premature death was 2 per cent.



Being in a bridge club could be just as good for your health as doing regular exercise. *Photo: Rob Gunstone*

However if contact was maintained with just one club, the risk of premature death rose to 5 per cent. And if participation with both clubs ceased, the risk of premature death jumped 12 per cent.

"Groups generally give people a sense of belonging and identity," Dr Steffens said. "They provide people with a sense of agency, purpose, meaning and social support."

The University of Queensland study followed 424 people aged over 50 in England just before and in the six years following retirement. The average age of each participant was 60 and the clubs they belonged to were not all tied to physical activity.

Their results were compared to the same number of people still in the workforce and matched for age, sex and health status.

Dr Steffens said the results suggested more attention needed to be given to encouraging people approaching retirement to stay engaged with their community through social clubs.

"The common messages we are exposed to as retirement looms are about how to manage your finances, medical care or physical exercise but we don't really talk about social planning," he said.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/sci-tech/clubbing-its-the-secret-to-living-longer-20160215-gmv26y.html#ixzz45UOVSKJf>

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