

## Gait Speed Predicts 10-Year Survival in Elders

*Predictive value roughly equaled that of more complex clinical assessments.*

Assessment of life expectancy often is an important factor in decisions about whether to continue screening and treatment regimens, but no well-established predictive models are available. Researchers used data from nine cohort studies to assess the value of walking speed as a predictor of life expectancy in about 35,000 community-dwelling older adults (mean age at baseline, 74; predominantly white women). The studies used various walking distances (8–20 feet), and a range of mean baseline walking speeds were reported (roughly 5–11 seconds to walk 20 feet). About 18,000 deaths occurred during median follow-ups of 6 to 15 years.

A significant association was noted between gait speed and 10-year survival, particularly for participants older than 75. Ten-year survival increased by roughly 12% for each 0.1-m/second increase in walking speed. Predictive value of walking speed was as accurate as the combined predictive value of age, sex, weight, smoking status, blood pressure, chronic disease burden, and prior hospitalizations.

**Comment:** Walking speed is a readily accessible piece of clinical data that modestly predicts 10-year survival, and it is as accurate as more-complicated predictive models. The authors suggest that a gait speed of 0.6 m/second (10 seconds to walk 20 feet) is a threshold below which risk for early mortality is high, but the greater clinical value probably is in following change in gait speed over time. Substantial decline might trigger discussion about the appropriateness of continued aggressive care.

— [Thomas L. Schwenk, MD](#)

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