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Retire later to live longer

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22 October, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Retire later to live longer

Early retirement, as is commonly believed, does not help retirees to live longer and it may even shorten one's life. This is the conclusion of a study published on October 21 by the British Medical Journal. The research involved tracking more than 3,500 employees working for Shell Oil in Texas over a 26-year period. The workers retired at 55, 60 or 65 and were monitored to see what effect their age at retirement had on their lifespan. Researchers considered factors such as gender and socioeconomic status in ascertaining whether retiring early is associated with better survival. It seems the findings have displaced the myth that spending our golden years at a leisurely pace away from the daily grind of the nine to five will increase our longevity. It appears that retiring later provides for a longer life.

The results were astonishing. The life expectancy of employees who retired at 55 was significantly reduced compared with those who retired at the age of 65. The researchers concluded that: "Retiring early at 55 or 60 was not associated with better survival than retiring at 65 in a cohort of past employees of the petrochemical industry. Mortality was higher in employees who retired at 55 than in those who continued working." Leader of the research team Shan Tsai said: "Although some workers retired at 55 because of failing health, these results clearly show that early retirement is not associated with increased survival. On the contrary, mortality improved with increasing age at retirement for people from both high and low socioeconomic groups."

WARM-UPS

1. RETIRED: You have now retired from your job after working hard for 45 years. Today is the first day of your retirement. Walk around the class and talk to other students about retirement and your long working life. Are you happy or sad? What are your plans?

2. GOLDEN YEARS: What is your image of retirement? Do you think retirement will be a wonderful time? Talk about this with your partner(s). The following words may help you in your conversations:

- Hobbies
- Health
- Money
- Travel
- New interests
- Love life
- Grandchildren
- Senility
- Boredom
- Increased chances to study English

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Retirement / living longer / employees / Shell Oil / Texas / lifespan / gender / socioeconomic status / survival / the daily grind / failing health / mortality

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. LIFESPAN: How long do you want to live for? Would you like to live longer than 100 years? Talk with your partner(s) about the advantages and disadvantages of living to such a ripe old age.

5. RETIREMENT: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with retirement. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. LONGEVITY OPINIONS: In pairs / groups, talk about what you think of these opinions on retirement and longevity:

- a. Everyone should work until they are 70.
- b. Retiring at 55 is too young and too lazy.
- c. Retiring early means you are not doing your duty to your country.
- d. Early retirement is really just a luxury for those in rich countries.
- e. Early retirement puts too much strain on government pension systems.
- f. Jobs will be created by new service industries springing up for older people.
- g. People who work hard for 40 years deserve to retire and have a leisurely life.
- h. Science will allow many of us to live to be over 100. We should then retire at 80.
- i. I want to retire now.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. The common perception is that early retirement means a longer life. | T / F |
| b. People who work for the Shell Oil Company have longer lives. | T / F |
| c. A study monitored the survival techniques of 55-year-olds. | T / F |
| d. Life away from the daily grind of a 9-to-5 job increases our lifespan. | T / F |
| e. The results of the study were pretty much as expected. | T / F |
| f. Working in the petrochemical industry helps increase longevity. | T / F |
| g. The study found most people retired early because of failing health. | T / F |
| h. The study found mortality rates improved in those who retired later. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| a. shorten | flabbergasting |
| b. involved | death |
| c. tracking | monitoring |
| d. ascertaining | group of subjects |
| e. golden years | old age |
| f. astonishing | considerably |
| g. significantly | decrease |
| h. cohort | determining |
| i. mortality | deteriorating |
| j. failing | comprised |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| a. as is | gender and socioeconomic status |
| b. The research involved tracking | expectancy |
| c. Researchers considered factors such as | more than 3,500 employees |
| d. the myth that spending our | socioeconomic groups |
| e. the daily grind of | were astonishing |
| f. The results | contrary |
| g. life | commonly believed |
| h. workers retired at 55 | golden years at a leisurely pace... |
| i. on the | because of failing health |
| j. people from both high and low | the nine to five |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Retire later to live longer

Early retirement, as is _____ believed, does not help retirees to live longer and it may even _____ one's life. This is the conclusion of a study published on October 21 by the British Medical Journal. The research _____ tracking more than 3,500 employees working for Shell Oil in Texas over a 26-year period. The workers retired at 55, 60 or 65 and were monitored to see what effect their age at retirement had on their _____. Researchers considered factors such as gender and socioeconomic status in ascertaining whether retiring early is associated with better _____. It seems the findings have displaced the _____ that spending our golden years at a leisurely _____ away from the daily _____ of the nine to five will increase our longevity. It appears that retiring later provides for a longer life.

The _____ were astonishing. The life expectancy of employees who retired at 55 was _____ reduced compared with those who retired at the age of 65. The researchers concluded that: "Retiring early at 55 or 60 was not _____ with better survival than retiring at 65 in a cohort of _____ employees of the petrochemical industry. Mortality was higher in employees who retired at 55 than in those who continued working." Leader of the research team Shan Tsai said: "Although some workers retired at 55 because of _____ health, these results _____ show that early retirement is not associated with increased survival. On the contrary, _____ improved with increasing age at retirement for people from both high and low socioeconomic _____."

survival
pace
shorten
lifespan
grind
commonly
myth
involved

associated
groups
significantly
clearly
past
results
mortality
failing

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Retire later to live longer

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AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'life'** and **'span'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "RETIREMENT" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about retirement and the best age to retire.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

commonly

tracking

lifespan

ascertaining

myth

provides

astonishing

significantly

cohort

failing

survival

contrary

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. When do you want to retire?
- c. What do you associate with retirement?
- d. Do you think people should work for as long as they can?
- e. Is early retirement a concept for rich countries only?
- f. Do you think you'd get bored with nothing to do all day?
- g. Should laws require people to retire later to avoid putting a strain on government pension systems?
- h. What are the advantages of being old?
- i. Are the old people you know enjoying their lives or retirement?
- j. Do you ever think of life as a daily grind?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. When does middle age and old age start in your country?
- d. Are you looking forward to retirement?
- e. What will happen to society if longevity continues to increase?
- f. Do you think people taking early retirement are lazy?
- g. Would you take advantage of medical treatments that allowed you to live to 150?
- h. Do you consciously do anything to help you to live longer?
- i. What do you think of the idea of scrapping retirement?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

OLD AGE: People's perceptions of old age are often quite different from the realities. In pairs / groups, look at the topics below and talk about your perceptions of them in your old age.

TOPIC	PERCEPTION
Health	
Money	
Love life	
Hobbies and interests	
Ambitions	
Travel	
Free time	
Education	

Change partners and tell each what you talked about with your previous partner(s).

Compare your perceptions with the real lives of some old people you know. Are there any differences in your perceptions and the realities?

Do you think your perceptions will be realized in your case?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on longevity around the world. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LIFE: Make a poster outlining the kinds of lives lead by two 65-year-olds in different countries. One retired at the age of 60 with a very comfortable pension. The other still works on the land as a subsistence farmer. Describe the future of the two people. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all describe similar things?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: You have been retired now for one month. Write your diary/journal entry about your thoughts on that month. Describe a typical day spent in retirement. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. F c. F d. F e. F f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. shorten	decrease
b. involved	comprised
c. tracking	monitoring
d. ascertaining	determining
e. golden years	old age
f. astonishing	flabbergasting
g. significantly	considerably
h. cohort	group of subjects
i. mortality	death
j. failing	deteriorating

PHRASE MATCH:

a. as is	commonly believed
b. The research involved tracking	more than 3,500 employees
c. Researchers considered factors such as	gender and socioeconomic status
d. the myth that spending our	golden years at a leisurely pace ...
e. the daily grind of	the nine to five
f. The results	were astonishing
g. life	expectancy
h. workers retired at 55	because of failing health
i. on the	contrary
j. people from both high and low	socioeconomic groups

GAP FILL:

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Early retirement, as is **commonly** believed, does not help retirees to live longer and it may even **shorten** one's life. This is the conclusion of a study published on October 21 by the British Medical Journal. The research **involved** tracking more than 3,500 employees working for Shell Oil in Texas over a 26-year period. The workers retired at 55, 60 or 65 and were monitored to see what effect their age at retirement had on their **lifespan**. Researchers considered factors such as gender and socioeconomic status in ascertaining whether retiring early is associated with better **survival**. It seems the findings have displaced the **myth** that spending our golden years at a leisurely **pace** away from the daily **grind** of the nine to five will increase our longevity. It appears that retiring later provides for a longer life.

The **results** were astonishing. The life expectancy of employees who retired at 55 was **significantly** reduced compared with those who retired at the age of 65. The researchers concluded that: "Retiring early at 55 or 60 was not **associated** with better survival than retiring at 65 in a cohort of **past** employees of the petrochemical industry. Mortality was higher in employees who retired at 55 than in those who continued working." Leader of the research team Shan Tsai said: "Although some workers retired at 55 because of **failing** health, these results **clearly** show that early retirement is not associated with increased survival. On the contrary, **mortality** improved with increasing age at retirement for people from both high and low socioeconomic **groups**."