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<p>Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract</p> <p>The main purpose of this study was to examine trends and associations of functional ability and health behaviour among a national sample of elderly people in Finland from the 1985 to 2003. Furthermore, sociodemographic variation of functional ability and health behaviour were assessed.</p> <p>Biennial surveys on health behaviour among 65-79-year-old Finnish population were used to study 13 232 men and women from 1985 to 2003. Response rate has surpassed 80 % on average. Self-reported activities of daily living were used to study functional ability. Indicators of health behaviour were diet, smoking, use of alcohol, physical activity and also body mass index. Furthermore chronic diseases were controlled for when examining associations between functional ability with health behaviours. Sociodemographic variation was studied through age groups, main occupation before retirement and marital status. Age adjusted trends and, logistic and ordinal regression analyses were computed to derive the results.</p> <p>The study revealed improving functional ability from the mid- 1980s to the shift of the millennium. Finnish elderly today eat healthier and smoke slightly less, but use more alcohol and are more often obese than their age-mates couple of decades ago. Healthy diet, smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity were most prevalent among youngest of the respondents. Former farmers had lowest prevalence of healthy diet and highest prevalence of obesity. Former office employees used more alcohol than others. Married elderly had higher prevalence of healthy diet and lower prevalence of smoking than non-married. Smoking, higher use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and obesity were associated with inferior functional ability. These behaviours and chronic diseases were found to be mediating factors for sociodemographic differences in functional ability.</p> <p>Improving functional ability together with some improvements in health behaviour indicates healthier years for future elderly people. Despite these improvements, sub-group disparities are still evident. These disparities together with information on rising prevalence of alcohol use and obesity are challenges for public health.</p>		
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