Outwit the Grim Reaper by walking faster

Older men who walk at a speed of at least 1.36 metres per second (m/s), equivalent to about 5km per hour, are likely to live longer, according to an article written by researchers from Concord Hospital in the Christmas issue of the British Medical Journal.

The Grim Reaper is a well known mythological and literary figure who personifies death. To assess his role in walking speed and mortality, a team of researchers based at Concord Hospital analysed the walking patterns of 1,705 men aged 70 and over who participated in the Concord Health and Ageing in Men Project (CHAMP).

Dr Danijela Gnjidic, who co-authored a study, said they estimated the speed at which the Grim Reaper (or Death) walks is 0.82 m/s and Death is unlikely to walk quicker than 1.36 m/s.

“We assessed participants’ walking speed at baseline and survival over the five-year study period,” Dr Gnjidic said.

The men lived in the inner west of Sydney and were recruited from January 2005 to June 2007. The group included a high proportion of immigrants and only 50 percent of the participants were born in Australia, with 20 percent born in Italy and the other main countries of birth being Great Britain, Greece and China.

A total of 266 deaths were observed during the follow-up.

“The results show that the average walking speed was 0.88 m/s. Interestingly, no men with walking speeds of 1.36 m/s or above had contact with the Grim Reaper,” said Dr Gnjidic.

“The results support our theory that faster speeds are protective against mortality because fast walkers can maintain a safe distance from the Grim Reaper.”

The article was the third most popular article in the Christmas issue and has sparked media interest from afar as Los Angeles, Alberta, Canada and India.

The full article can be read on the BMJ website [www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d7679](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d7679)