

# Low-to-moderate activity levels can significantly improve quality of life after bowel cancer

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World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) today announces two new studies, which find that a reduction in sedentary behavior has a positive

impact on the quality of life after bowel cancer.

The first study, published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, analyzes nearly 400 bowel cancer survivors for two years to assess how sedentary behavior and moderate-to-vigorous [physical activity](#) impact health-related quality of life and fatigue. The results show that a combination of leading a less [sedentary lifestyle](#) and doing more physical activity are beneficial for health-related quality of life and fatigue levels in this population.

Importantly, the findings also show that even without increasing moderate-to-vigorous physical activity levels, decreasing prolonged sedentary behavior can still have a positive impact. This may be particularly relevant for those survivors who may not be able to perform activities at moderate to vigorous intensity, for instance brisk walking or running, because of their older age and/or presence of comorbidities. For those survivors, replacing sedentary behavior with activities such as gentle housework or light walking may be especially important, and could therefore be a relevant target for lifestyle interventions. Moreover, the study shows that the combination of sitting less and moving more can especially improve the daily functioning of survivors after the end of cancer treatment.

The mechanisms causing this are not yet known, but further research led by Professor Matty Weijenberg, published in *Scientific Reports*, found that high levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in bowel cancer survivors is associated with anti-inflammatories in the body. This could potentially explain the health-enhancing effects of physical activity in bowel cancer survivors and supports its future integration into post-treatment care in this population.

Dr. Anna Diaz Font, Head of Research Funding at World Cancer Research Fund, says that "being physically active is one of WCRF's 10

key Cancer Prevention Recommendations. What this new research tells us is that adhering to these lifestyle recommendations will also have a huge [positive impact](#) for survivors of bowel cancer. It adds to our growing body of research that being physically active and not leading a sedentary lifestyle can not only prevent cancer, but also help to improve quality of life during survival."

Lead researcher, Dr. Martijn Bours of Maastricht University commented on the findings that "we are at an exciting age in bowel cancer research, where we are seeing a growing population of people who are surviving the illness. But it is common to see long-lasting health problems related to a cancer diagnosis and treatment, for instance, fatigue and nerve damage following chemotherapy, which can have a negative impact on daily functioning and quality of life. Whilst we need to do more investigational studies to confirm these findings, this research suggests that by being physically active and reducing the amount of sedentary time, we may be able to reduce the impact of these long-lasting health problems and improve the daily functioning and quality of life of cancer survivors."

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the fourth most common cancer in the UK. There are around 42,300 new [bowel](#) cancer cases in the UK every year; approximately 110 every day. Bowel cancer is most common in adults aged 60+, but cases are rising in adults under 50, and there have been recent calls to lower the screening age from 50 to 45.

It is currently estimated that 54% of [bowel cancer](#) cases are preventable due to lifestyle factors, which include: eating too much red and processed meat, not eating enough foods containing fiber or wholegrains, being overweight or obese, not doing enough physical activity, drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco. Eating healthily, living an active life and maintaining a healthy weight can help reduce the risk of 12 types of

[cancer](#).

**More information:** Eline H. van Roekel et al, Longitudinal associations of physical activity with plasma metabolites among colorectal cancer survivors up to 2 years after treatment, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-92279-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-92279-9)

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