

Most cancer survivors not exercising enough to benefit

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Despite the benefits that physical activity can offer, a mere 10% of cancer survivors are exercising enough to reap those benefits, according to research conducted by Yale Cancer Center and the Yale School of Public Health. The findings will be presented beginning April 5, at the American Association for Cancer Research Annual Meeting 2014, in San Diego.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recommends cancer survivors engage in 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity, and two sessions of strength training, every week. The Yale researchers found that among the population of cancer survivors studied in the United States, only 10% met these physical activity guidelines from the government.

Yet, all survivors who said they exercised at recommended levels reported better quality of life (less fatigue, improved mental and physical health, and increased satisfaction in social activities and relationships).

The team reviewed data from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey that included information from more than 19 million cancer survivors. The large sample size of survivors and the inclusion of more than 10 types of cancer were unprecedented in this type of study.

Historically, studies of this kind have focused primarily on breast cancer survivors, said co-author Melinda Irwin, co-director of the cancer prevention and control program at Yale Cancer Center, and associate professor of epidemiology at Yale School of Public Health.

"The finding that only 10% of cancer survivors meet physical activity guidelines is very concerning. We know that exercise not only improves multiple aspects of quality of life, but other studies have shown it also is associated with lower risk of recurrence and mortality," Irwin said. "This rate is similar to what we see in the healthy adult population, so we need to make huge efforts to increase physical activity for everyone."

Physicians and survivors should take note of the findings, said co-author Dr. Agnees Chagpar, associate professor of surgery at Yale School of Medicine, and director of the Breast Center at Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale-New Haven. "Given that this is a priority for patients and physicians alike, perhaps we, as oncologists, should be writing more prescriptions for [physical activity](#)," Chagpar said.

"We hope to add to the body of evidence to convince [cancer survivors](#) that being active is not only good for them, but will make them feel better, too," said Apoorva Tewari, a student at Yale School of Medicine, who was also an author on the study.

More information: The presentation abstract is available online: www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/V...6a-92e7-c26446874d93

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