

# Lifestyle choices may affect the long-term heart health of childhood cancer survivors

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A new study has found that following a healthy lifestyle may lower childhood cancer survivors' risk of developing the metabolic syndrome. Published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings indicate that children with cancer and adults who had cancer when they were children should receive information about how their lifestyle may influence their long-term health.

Adults who had [cancer](#) as children are known to be at increased risk for the metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors that increases the likelihood of developing heart disease and other health problems such as diabetes and stroke. People with the metabolic syndrome have some combination of factors including [high blood pressure](#), abnormal cholesterol and glucose levels, and increased body fat.

Kirsten Ness, PT, PhD, of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, and her colleagues looked to see if lifestyle habits might affect [cancer survivors'](#) risk of developing the metabolic syndrome. The team studied 1598 childhood cancer survivors who were cancer-free for at least 10 years. Questionnaires and tests helped the researchers assess whether the participants followed healthy lifestyle recommendations issued by the World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research. Those who met at least four of seven recommendations were classified as following the guidelines. "This study is unique because of the large, well characterized population of survivors of various diagnoses that we studied, many years from their original cancer diagnosis," said Dr. Ness.

The metabolic syndrome was present in 31.8 percent of the participants, and 27.0 percent of participants followed the healthy lifestyle guidelines. Females who did not follow the guidelines were 2.4 and males were 2.2 times more likely to have the metabolic syndrome than

those who followed the guidelines.

"These findings are important because they indicate that adults who were treated for cancer as children have the opportunity to influence their own health outcomes," said Dr. Ness. "Cancer survivors should not smoke. In addition, adopting a lifestyle that includes maintaining a healthy body weight, regular physical activity, and a diet that includes fruits and vegetables and that limits refined sugars, excessive alcohol, red meat, and salt has potential to prevent development of the [metabolic syndrome](#)."

**More information:** "Lifestyle and metabolic syndrome in adult survivors of childhood cancer: a report from the St. Jude Lifetime Cohort Study." Webb A. Smith, Chenghong Li, Kerri Nottage, Daniel A. Mulrooney, Gregory T. Armstrong, Jennifer Q. Lanctot, Wassim Chemaitilly, Joseph H. Laver, Deo Kumar Srivastava, Leslie L. Robison, Melissa M. Hudson, and Kirsten K. Ness. *CANCER*; Published Online: July 28, 2014 ([DOI: 10.1002/cncr.28670](#)).

Provided by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

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