

Beating childhood cancer does not make survivors healthier adults

12 August 2014

Having survived cancer as a child does not necessarily have a ripple effect that makes people lead a healthier lifestyle once they grow up. In fact, in a report derived from a National Cancer Institute-funded study of childhood cancer survivors known as the Chicago Healthy Living Study, investigators found that childhood cancer survivors in no way adhere more closely to guidelines on healthy eating than their cancer-free peers. The findings are published in Springer's *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*.

Childhood cancer survivors face different health-care challenges and are more susceptible to dying earlier than the general population. They have a higher risk of second cancers, heart disease, body weight disorders and psychosocial problems. Therefore the American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity encourages the efforts of cancer survivors to lead healthier lifestyles.

Because so little is known about how well [cancer survivors](#) adhere to these guidelines, Chloe Berdan and colleagues examined selected data from the Chicago Healthy Living Study participants. The University of Illinois investigative team led by Drs. Stolley and Sharp conducted structured health-focused interviews with 431 [childhood cancer survivors](#) and 361 people who never had the disease. The survivors, aged between 18 and 59 years old, were all diagnosed with a malignant cancer before their 21st birthdays.

No marked difference was found between how survivors and members of the control group adhered to the overall American Cancer Society guidelines. Survivors had on average a [body mass index](#) of about 1.2 kg/m² lower than that of members of the [control group](#) and smoked less. They consumed less fiber. In fact, only about one in every ten survivors (10.2 percent) met fiber recommendations, while only 17.7 percent ate five fruits or vegetables per day. Survivors were better

at meeting the goal of at least five hours of moderate activity per week (60.5 percent) than to sticking to any of the other guidelines, and on average scored under 50 percent for the quality of their diets. The 0.7 percent of survivors who actually adhered fully to the [guidelines](#) tended to be women, non-smokers and people with a good view of their own health.

"There is still much room for improvement in educating and encouraging survivors to follow healthier diets and lifestyles," says Berdan. "Adopting such behavior during early adulthood may have a lasting impact on their quality of life and overall survival."

More information: Berdan, C.A. et al (2014). Childhood cancer survivors and adherence to the American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity, *Journal of Cancer Survivorship* [DOI: 10.1007/s11764-014-0376-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11764-014-0376-0)

Provided by Springer

APA citation: Beating childhood cancer does not make survivors healthier adults (2014, August 12) retrieved 5 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-childhood-cancer-survivors-healthier-adults.html>

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