

Guidelines Say Diet, Exercise, Weight Control Improve Odds after Cancer Diagnosis

New American Cancer Society Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Cancer Survivors

ATLANTA – April 26, 2012 – New guidelines from the American Cancer Society say for many cancers, maintaining a healthy weight, getting adequate physical activity, and eating a healthy diet can reduce the chance of recurrence and increase the likelihood of disease-free survival after a diagnosis. The recommendations are included in newly released Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Cancer Survivors, published [early online in CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians](#).

Increasing evidence shows that for many cancers, excess weight, lack of exercise, and poor nutrition increase the risk of cancer recurrence and reduce the likelihood of disease-free and overall survival for cancer patients. “The data suggests that cancer survivors, just like everyone else, benefit from these important steps,” said Colleen Doyle MS RD, American Cancer Society director of nutrition and physical activity and co-author of the guidelines. “While we’ve published previous reports outlining the evidence on the impact of nutrition and physical activity on cancer recurrence and survival, this is the first time the evidence has been strong enough to release formal guidelines for survivorship, as we’ve done for cancer prevention. Living a physically active lifestyle and eating a healthy diet should absolutely be top of mind for anyone who’s been diagnosed with cancer.”

The report was last updated in 2006, and was first created in 2001. For the update, a group of experts in nutrition, physical activity, and cancer survivorship evaluated the scientific evidence and best clinical practices related to optimal nutrition and physical activity after the diagnosis of cancer. Among the review’s conclusions:

- Avoiding weight gain throughout treatment may be important not only for survivors who are overweight, but also those of normal weight.
- Intentional weight loss after recovering from cancer treatment among overweight and obese patients may be associated with health-related benefits.
- Evidence strongly suggests that exercise is not only safe and feasible during cancer treatment, but that it can also improve physical functioning, fatigue, multiple aspects of quality of life, and may even increase the rate of completion of chemotherapy.
- Physical activity after cancer diagnosis is associated with a reduced risk of cancer recurrence and improved overall mortality among multiple cancer survivor groups, including breast, colorectal, prostate, and ovarian cancer.
- Among breast cancer survivors, physical activity after diagnosis has consistently been associated with reduced risk of breast cancer recurrence and breast cancer-specific mortality.
- Results from observational studies suggest that diet and food choices may affect cancer progression, risk of recurrence, and overall survival in individuals who have been treated for cancer.
- For example, a dietary pattern high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, poultry, and fish was found to be associated with reduced mortality compared with a dietary pattern characterized by a high intake of refined grains, processed and red meats, desserts, high-fat dairy products, and French fries in women after breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.
- Compelling evidence exists against the use of select supplements in certain oncology populations; therefore, health care professionals and survivors need to proceed with caution.

“As more people survive cancer, there is increasing interest in finding information about food choices, physical activity, and dietary supplements to improve treatment outcomes, quality of life, and overall survival,” said Doyle. “Our report summarizes the findings of this expert panel, and is intended to present health care providers with the best possible information with which to help cancer survivors and their families make informed choices related to nutrition and physical activity.”

The recommendations also include specific guidance for people diagnosed with breast, colorectal, endometrial, ovarian, lung, prostate, head and neck, and hematologic cancers. It also includes a section with answers to common questions about alcohol, organic foods, sugar, supplements, and several other areas of interest.

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