

Physical Activity After Cancer Diagnosis Linked to Lower Healthcare Costs Among Older Survivors, New Study Finds

American Cancer Society research supports physical activity as part of comprehensive cancer survivorship care

Key takeaways:

- Staying physically active after a cancer diagnosis may help lower healthcare costs for older cancer survivors.
- Cancer survivors who were inactive faced higher healthcare costs, particularly those diagnosed with early-stage cancers.
- Survivors who were active before diagnosis but reduced their physical activity after diagnosis had lower healthcare costs, reinforcing the message that some activity may be better than none.

ATLANTA, October 21, 2026 — Cancer is one of the most expensive conditions to treat in the United States, with national costs of treatment and care projected to continue rising as the population ages. A new study led by researchers at the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) suggests that physical activity could save survivors thousands of dollars. The report found that cancer survivors age 65 and older who increased their physical activity after diagnosis, including brisk walking, biking, and dancing, had lower healthcare costs than those who remained inactive before and after diagnosis. The findings are published today in [CANCER](#), an interdisciplinary international journal of ACS.

“Previous studies have shown physical activity is associated with better survival, better treatment tolerance, and higher overall physical and mental quality of life in cancer patients and survivors,” said [Dr. Erika Rees-Punia](#), senior principal scientist, population science at the American Cancer Society, and lead author of the study. “It’s encouraging that our findings can also add cost savings to the benefits of staying active during survivorship.”

The study examined physical activity patterns and healthcare costs among 12,268 cancer survivors age 65 and older, using data from the Cancer Prevention Study-II linked with Medicare claims. Researchers evaluated physical activity levels before and after a cancer diagnosis and compared them with healthcare costs following diagnosis.

Scientists found that healthcare costs were generally lower as physical activity levels increased, especially among older survivors diagnosed with early-stage cancers. Compared to cancer survivors who met the [American Cancer Society’s Physical Activity Guideline for Cancer Survivors](#), those with early-stage cancers who reported no physical activity incurred approximately \$3,812 more in healthcare costs during the first year after diagnosis.

The study also found that physical activity patterns over time were associated with differences in healthcare spending. Among survivors diagnosed with regional or distant-stage cancers, those who were active before diagnosis and modestly reduced their physical activity after diagnosis incurred annual costs around \$5,411 lower than those who remained inactive before and after their diagnosis.

“The findings highlight opportunities for healthcare providers, health systems, and policymakers to support physical activity as part of comprehensive cancer survivorship care,” added Rees-Punia. “With the number of cancer survivors continuing to grow, identifying effective strategies to improve outcomes while reducing healthcare costs is increasingly important.”

Other ACS researchers contributing to this study include [Christina Newton, MSPH](#), [Dr. Alpa Patel](#), [Dr. Kathryn Chiang](#), [Dr. Lauren Bates-Fraser](#), and senior author [Dr. Robin Yabroff](#).

Additional ACS Resources:

- [Nutrition and Physical Activity Guideline for Cancer Survivors](#)
- [Physical Activity When You Have Cancer](#)
- [Financial Hardship and Economic Burden with Cancer](#)
- [For Your Best Life After Cancer—Eat Well & Be Physically Active](#)

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About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 110 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#).

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