Many Cancer Survivors Age Faster

Cancer treatments can cause long-term problems linked to aging, such as heart problems and brittle bones.

December 29, 2017

Chemotherapy and radiation are two of the most common treatments for cancer. But these and other therapies can also cause survivors to age faster and die sooner, suggest new study findings published in the journal ESMO Open, reports HealthDay.

For the study, researchers at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, conducted a comprehensive review of the pathogenesis of the accelerated aging-like state in survivors of cancer.

Researchers discovered that cancer survivors not only naturally age faster, but they also are more likely to develop long-term health problems related to aging even while they are young.

In addition, the study's authors reported that children who survive cancer have a 30 percent lower life expectancy than the general population. What's more, these kids are three to six times more likely to develop a second cancer.

According to the study's authors, findings showed that:

- chemotherapy, radiation therapy and other cancer treatments cause aging at a genetic and cellular level, prompting DNA to start unraveling and cells to die off sooner than normal
- bone marrow transplant recipients are eight times more likely to become frail than their healthy siblings
- long-term steroid treatment is associated with an increased risk of cataracts, brittle bones, nerve damage, impaired wound healing and diminished immune response
- cancer drugs have been associated with hearing loss, reduced thyroid levels, high blood pressure, heart failure, muscle weakness, arthritis, infertility, constipation and kidney and liver diseases
- radiation therapy has been linked to dementia, memory loss, hardened arteries and secondary

cancers

- the hormone drug tamoxifen, used against breast cancer, has been associated with cataracts.

“We are now beginning to see the gravity of a multitude of complications among cancer survivors,” said Shahrukh Hashmi, MD, senior researcher and assistant professor at the Mayo Clinic. “There is an essential and immediate need for formal cancer survivorship programs to prevent complications in millions of cancer survivors.”

These discoveries have prompted the medical community to find ways to reduce the amount, frequency and intensity of treatment necessary for certain types of cancer.

According to Hashmi, one way to reduce the chances of new cancer development and the development of heart disease is by making lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking, limiting alcohol consumption, eating better and exercising regularly.

Click here to learn about managing cancer treatment side effects.

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