New Study Finds Regular Exercise Program Impacts Cancer Risk

Adhering to physical activity recommendations could significantly lower the risk of developing cancer.

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A new, large study led by researchers at the American Cancer Society (ACS) shows adults sticking to an exercise program of 15 or more metabolic equivalent hours (MET) of physical activity per week (300 or more minutes of moderate activity or 150 or more minutes of vigorous activity) decreased their risk for cancer, including obesity-related cancers, compared with no intervention.

The findings [were] presented at this year's annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in Chicago, May 31-June 4, 2024.

For the study, scientists, led by Dr. Valeria Elahy, a post-doctoral fellow, cancer epidemiology, prevention, and survivorship at the American Cancer Society, conducted a hypothetical trial using data from 72,462 participants in the Cancer Prevention Study-II.

This study estimated the effect of different physical activity levels (>0-<7.5, 7.5-<15, and ≥15 MET-hour/week) on 14-year cancer risks using a parametric g-formula. Models were adjusted for confounders include age, sex, education, years since quitting smoking, family history of cancer, physical activity, body mass index, alcohol consumption, diet quality (measured by the ACS diet score), history of cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

The results showed under no intervention, the estimated 14-year risk for any cancer was 25.6% (95% CI: 25.2%, 26.1%), and for obesity-related cancers, it was 10.3% (95% CI: 10.0%, 10.5%). Compared with no intervention, engaging in 7.5-<15 MET-hours/week of physical activity (minimum recommended level) was linked with a 0.3% reduction in the risk of any cancer (95% CI: -0.5%, -0.1%) and a 0.1% reduction in the risk of obesity-related cancers (95% CI: -0.3%, 0.1%).

Engaging in ≥15 MET-hours/week of physical activity (twice the minimum recommended level) was linked with a 0.8% risk reduction for any cancer (95% CI: -1.2%, -0.4%) and a 0.8% risk reduction for obesity-related cancers (95% CI: -1.1%, -0.5%), compared with no intervention.

Researchers stress adherence to physical activity recommendations for cancer prevention could significantly lower the risk of developing cancers, including those related to obesity.

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Click here to read the study abstract.
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