

Walking and Gardening Offer Benefits for Cancer Patients

Even light physical activity can help.

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Regular physical activity—notably walking—can reduce cancer-related fatigue and improve quality of life for people with colorectal cancer, researchers reported at the American Society of Clinical Oncology Gastrointestinal Cancers Symposium.

Fatigue is a common symptom of cancer itself and can be a side effect of treatment. While people who experience fatigue may feel too exhausted to exercise, even light physical activity can help. In this analysis, which included more than 1,700 patients in the international ColoCare study, walking had the “strongest and most consistent signal” of benefit, and regular activity over time led to the best results, according to investigator Louisa Liu, MD, of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. These findings suggest that interventions to support physical activity during treatment and recovery are an important part of cancer care.

Another study found that indoor hydroponic gardening—a method of growing plants using nutrient-rich water instead of soil—helps improve mental health and quality of life. Thirty-six participants with various types and stages of cancer were given hydroponic kits and seeds for heirloom salad greens.

By the end of the eight-week study, they reported increased mental well-being, reduced depression and improved emotional and social functioning. What’s more, many said they were eating a healthier diet. “The improvements observed may be explained by gardening’s ability to engage the senses, reduce stress through autonomic nervous system modulation and foster a sense of responsibility and control,” says Taehyun Roh, PhD, of Texas A&M University School of Public Health.