Exercise Can Prevent Various Cancers

Just five hours of exercise each week can stop the development of certain cancers.

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People who regularly engage in physical activity gain numerous health benefits. Now, new study findings published in the Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports and Exercise show that if Americans exercised at a moderate intensity for a total of five hours each week over 46,000 cases of cancer could be averted each year, reports a press release from the American Cancer Society.

For the inquiry, scientists collected data on states' self-reported physical activity between 2013 and 2016 from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, ongoing nationwide assessments of the health of Americans.

In addition, researchers mined information about statewide cancer incidence from the U.S. Cancer Statistics database and gathered details about the risk of developing certain cancers.

Results showed that 3% of cancer cases among men and women age 30 and older could be chalked up to a lack of physical activity. The number of cases attributable to physical inactivity was higher among women (32,089) compared with men (14,277).

Additionally, researchers found that the adults in this group lived in Southern states, including Kentucky, West Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee and Mississippi. However, in states such as Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Washington and Wisconsin cancer incidence was much lower.

The types of cancers that could be attributed to physical inactivity included stomach cancer (16.9%), kidney cancer (11.0%), endometrial cancer (11.9%), colon cancer (9.3%), esophageal cancer (8.1%), women's breast cancer (6.5%) and bladder cancer (3.9%).

"These findings underscore the need to encourage physical activity as a means of cancer prevention and [the need to] implement individual- and community-level interventions that address the various behavioral and socioeconomic barriers to recreational physical activity," the researchers concluded.

"Understanding and reducing the behavioral and socioeconomic barriers to physical activity is essential for optimizing intervention strategies targeting at-risk groups across the country."

To learn more about how exercise affects cancer, read "Cancer Survivors and Physical Activity: What's New?"

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