

New Guideline: Exercise, Healthy Diet Key to Long-Term Health for Cancer Survivors

Nutrition and Physical Activity Guideline for Cancer Survivors Shows Obesity Linked to Recurrence and Mortality for Some Cancer Types.

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Regular physical activity and a healthy diet are two of the most important modifiable factors in long-term health for cancer survivors, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS) 2022 Nutrition and Physical Activity Guideline for Cancer Survivors released today in the ACS journal CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians.

Today, the cancer survival rate is 68% and there are 16.9 million cancer survivors in the United States.

A committee of scientific experts in nutrition, physical activity, oncology, community health and disparities reviewed the evidence that has accumulated since the publication of the last Guideline for survivors in 2012. Since then, the evidence has grown substantially, although many gaps remain, especially for the less common cancers.

Recommendations to improve long-term health and increase the likelihood of survival include:

- Avoid obesity and maintain or increase muscle mass through diet and physical activity.
- Engage in regular physical activity, with consideration of the type of cancer, patient health, treatment modalities, and symptoms and side effects
- Follow a healthy eating pattern that meets nutrient needs and is consistent with recommendations to prevent chronic disease.
- Follow the general advice of the American Cancer Society Guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention to reduce the risk of a new cancer.

“The link to a healthy diet and regular exercise in long-term cancer survival has become even

more clear during the last several years,” said Dr. Arif Kamal, American Cancer Society Chief Patient Officer. “We encourage all survivors to work with their care team to develop a program tailored to their individual needs, especially if they are experiencing symptoms or side effects that interfere with their ability to eat well or be active.”

Additionally, physical activity increases the chance of survival among survivors of several common cancer types – breast cancer, colorectal cancer and prostate cancer, among others. Obesity in breast, endometrial and bladder cancer patients is associated with worse outcomes.

Eating a “Western-style” diet (high in red and processed meat, high-fat dairy, refined grains, French fries, sweets and desserts) is associated with worse outcomes in colorectal, breast and prostate cancer survivors. The ACS Guideline recommends a healthy diet rich in vegetables, legumes, fruit, whole grains and low in red and processed meat, sugar-sweetened beverages, highly processed foods and refined grain products. The Mediterranean diet is an example of a healthy diet associated with improved outcomes in prostate cancer patients.

“The good news from this report is that diet and exercise can improve outcomes for survivors of some cancers,” Dr. Kamal said. “However, there is still a lot we don’t know, especially for cancer types that are less common or have lower survival rates, which is why ACS is committed to continuing to conduct and support research on this important topic.”

Other highlights of the report include:

- Whether alcohol intake influences prognosis after a cancer diagnosis is unclear for most cancers. However, higher alcohol consumption after laryngeal, pharyngeal or head & neck cancer or liver cancer is associated with a higher risk of death from all causes.
- Nutrition and physical activity assessment and counseling should begin as soon as possible after diagnosis and continue across the continuum of the cancer experience, as needed.
- The American Cancer Society publishes its Guideline on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Survivors to serve as a foundation for its communication, policy and community strategies and provide cancer patients, caregivers, and health practitioners with the most up-to-date information to support behaviors associated with improved outcomes.

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