

Exercise a tool to fight cancer

By Michael Clark

Few health conditions raise more concern than cancer. And with good reason — cancer is currently the second leading cause of death in the United States, and the number one cause of death for individuals under 80 years of age. As the prevalence of cancer continues to increase, the condition may become the number one cause of death in the next 10 years. However, there is hope for those who make the right choices.

All cancers are caused by abnormal changes in DNA and uncontrolled cell growth, yet the disease can be attributed to a number of internal and environmental factors. External factors include carcinogens; or cancer-causing chemicals found in the air or food sources, tobacco related products and sunlight. Internal factors include abnormal changes in DNA, hormonal imbalances, and genetic factors.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), the lifetime risk for cancer diagnosis is one in every two for men, and one in every three for women, with ten to fifteen percent being attributed solely to genetic predisposition. In 2006 alone there were 564,830 cancer related deaths. Of that total, tobacco use accounts for nearly one-third of cancer related deaths. Lifestyle choices, such as physical inactivity, obesity, and poor nutritional choices account for 188,000 deaths, or greater than one in every three 2006 cancer deaths. Therefore, the American Cancer Society considers two thirds of cancer deaths preventable via healthy choices and behaviors.

A decade's worth of good research has yielded promising results for those who choose to exercise. Well-established research shows that adults can decrease their risk of colon and breast



cancer by 30 percent to 60 percent through adequate amounts of physical activity. Evidence also suggests that physical activity provides protective effects against cancers of the prostate, lung, and female reproductive organs. The preventative benefits of exercise for other forms of cancer are currently being studied.

For cancer prevention, the ACS and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that adults obtain at least thirty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity, above the usual activities, at least five days per week. The exercise sessions should be cardiovascular in nature; weight training will not provide the same risk reduction benefit. Walking, jogging, or any physical activity that will raise the heart rate and breathing rate for thirty minutes will provide the risk reduction and protective effects. If walking is the preferred exercise, 100 steps per minute for

males and females should provide enough intensity, or difficulty, to be considered moderate to vigorous. Another way to monitor exercise intensity is the talk test. Essentially, exercisers should be able to carry on a light conversation during the activity, if a light conversation is difficult then the intensity is probably too high. Along with frequent exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and eating a balanced diet will award greater risk reductions. Please visit www.nhlbisupport.com, and www.mypyramid.gov for a more detailed explanation of a healthy body weight and a balanced diet.

There are also benefits to remaining physically active throughout cancer treatment and recovery. Radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and surgery all have physical and psychological side effects. It is common for those in treatment to experience negative changes in body weight, fat and muscle mass, immune function, and quality of life.

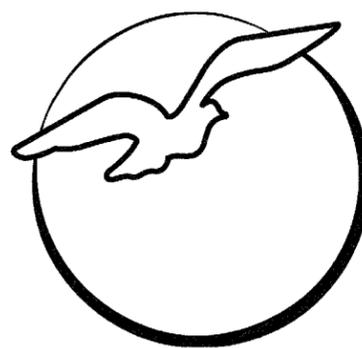
Psychological side effects can include fatigue, sleeplessness, nausea, and depression for those in treatment or recent remission from the disease.

Studies show that exercise is generally safe for those in treatment and recent remission, and can alleviate many of the physical and psychological side effects associated mentioned above. Exercises to engage in during cancer treatment and recovery will depend on the day-to-day abilities of each individual. The best exercise program includes cardiovascular, resistance, and flexibility training. This type of program would consist of walking and stretching on most days of the week, with light intensity weight training on every other day. It's important to remember that the exercise sessions, in this case, are being used to maintain physical abilities and alleviate side

effects of treatment; pushing too hard while in treatment may do more harm than good.

A cancer diagnosis raises huge concern for those who experience it. However, cancer affects us all, directly or indirectly. So remember, we have choices. Good lifestyle choices can help prevent the disease, or help alleviate side effects and maintain strength and vitality throughout the cancer experience. The bottom line is this: exercise, along with other healthy behaviors, will lower the risk factors and help prevent the condition, and for those in treatment and recovery, a physical activity program will enhance overall quality of life.

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