Exercise "Coming Into Its Own" as Cancer Fighter, Researcher Says

New Research Revealing How Exercise Provides Unique Protection

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Speaking at the AICR/WCRF International Research Conference on Food, Nutrition and Cancer, researcher Dr. Christine Friedenreich detailed mounting evidence that physical activity offers protection against cancer over and above its proven ability to prevent excess weight.

Dr. Friedenreich said that regular exercise has long been known to be associated with the prevention of obesity – and the extra cancer risks that accompany excess body fat. But according to the scientist, who is a professor at the University of Calgary and Associate Director of the Alberta Cancer Board, research is now revealing that the links between exercise and lower cancer risk are much more direct.

"Exercise is coming into its own as a primary means of preventing cancer and improving cancer survival," she said. "It's one of the decisions we all make that has the biggest impact on whether or not we get cancer, along with whether or not we smoke and what kinds of food we eat."

Regular Exercise Appears to "Reset" the Body's Systems

As scientific understanding of the obesity-cancer link continues to improve, this new knowledge is shedding light on why physically active people have lower cancer risk, Dr. Friedenreich said.

"It appears that being physically active may reset several of the body's functions in precisely the same way that obesity and overweight disrupt them," she said.

Specifically, exercise seems to help regulate the production of a range of hormones and "growth factors" that have been associated with cancer risk. These substances are thought to be produced continually and in high amounts within the excess fat cells of overweight and obese individuals.

Dr. Friedenreich pointed to research suggesting that exercise decreases the overproduction of sex hormones that are related to risk of several cancers including those of breast, prostate, endometrium, ovary and testes.

"Physical activity also reduces fat deposits, which makes it harder for dietary carcinogens to be stored long-term in the body. It may also improve the body's natural antioxidant defense systems and may strengthen other immune defenses as well."

A specific protective role against colon cancer is likely, because exercise speeds the movement of food through the colon and decreases the secretion of bile acids – both of which are factors in risk of colon cancer.

"Physical activity is clearly linked to lower risk for colon and breast cancers," she said. There is now enough evidence to classify a **probable** link between physical activity and prostate cancer. **Possible** links exist between exercise and cancers of the endometrium and lung.

Moderate, Regular Exercise Provides Benefits, Researcher Says

To protect against cancer, Friedenreich echoed the recommendations of several health organizations that call for a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate–to-vigorous intensity activity per day for at least five days a week.

"If that sounds like a lot," she said, "consider that 'moderate-to-vigorous' means any activity that raises the heart rate and/or causes the individual to sweat. A brisk walk, for instance. Even heavy housework or yard work. The key is to get moving and keep moving."

If your weight has been slowly increasing, take the initiative. *Shape Your Future…Your Weigh!*™ can provide additional practical strategies to prevent weight gain. Your Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian provides guidance on modifying your portion size to stay fit and healthy. Call them today!