

Walking prevents bone loss caused from prostate cancer treatment

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Exercise may reduce, and even reverse, bone loss caused by hormone and radiation therapies used in the treatment of localized prostate cancer, thereby decreasing the potential risk of bone fractures and improving quality of life for these men, according to a study presented on October 28, 2007, at the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology's 49th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles.

“Prostate cancer patients are not routinely advised to exercise. Walking is one tool that prostate cancer patients can use to improve their health and minimize the side effects of cancer and cancer treatments,” said Paula Chiplis, PhD., RN, the lead author of the study and a clinical instructor and senior research assistant at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. “Walking has no harmful side effects, if done moderately, but it can dramatically improve life for men suffering from side effects from some prostate cancer treatments.”

Men with localized prostate cancer frequently receive radiation therapy followed by months of hormone therapy to treat their cancer. Radiation is used to kill the cancer cells, while hormone therapy decreases testosterone and estrogen that feed the cancer cells, thereby keeping the tumor from growing. Men undergoing hormone therapy lose between 4 to 13 percent of their bone density on an annual basis, compared to healthy men who lose between .5 to 1 percent per year, beginning in middle age. Men are typically not thought to be at risk for osteoporosis and bone fractures; however, their rate of bone loss is greater than that of post-menopausal women.

The study shows that prostate cancer patients undergoing hormone therapy that walked about five times a week for 30 minutes at a moderate pace maintained or gained bone density, while those who didn't exercise lost more than two percent of their bone density in eight to nine weeks.

The study involved 70 sedentary men with Stage I-III prostate cancer, who were randomly assigned to either participate in the exercise plan or usual care (not exercise) during radiation treatment, with more than half also receiving hormone therapy. Researchers wanted to determine the effects of a nurse-directed, home-based walking program in maintaining physical function and managing cancer- and treatment-related symptoms during radiation and hormone treatment for prostate cancer patients.

Source: American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology

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