

Lung cancer patients can tolerate post-surgery exercise, and can benefit from it

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Patients who have undergone surgical procedures for the removal of lung cancer can tolerate and benefit from exercise regimens started just a month after surgery, according to a new study led by researchers at the Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“Previous studies have demonstrated that exercise can benefit cancer survivors but lung cancer patients have been a particularly challenging group, because surgery on the lung was perceived to have a restrictive effect on the amount of exercise a person can do,” said Lee Jones, Ph.D., a researcher at Duke and lead investigator on the study. “Our study showed that this population can not only tolerate exercise but that it can lead to improved tolerance for exercise, and better quality of life.”

This study lays the foundation for future studies looking at the effect of exercise on survival in lung cancer patients, Jones said.

The researchers will share their findings in a poster presentation on Sunday, June 1, at this year’s American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting on May 31, in Chicago. The study was funded by the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

This study followed 20 newly diagnosed lung cancer patients, who had undergone surgery. Participants had been diagnosed with Stage I to Stage IIIb cancer.

The patients were expected to participate in three hour-long exercise

sessions per week, on stationary bikes. The study lasted 14 weeks.

The attendance rate for the exercise sessions was nearly 85 percent, and patients were less fatigued and gained greater aerobic fitness over the course of the study, as measured by what is known as a “maximal exercise test,” similar to the type Lance Armstrong performed prior to riding in the Tour De France. The test involves having a participant pedal until he can no longer tolerate it, and then measuring his oxygen levels by asking him to breathe into a device.

“What we found is that patients can stick with the regimen, and that they are functioning a lot better as a result,” Jones said. “Investigating the most effective type of exercise on changes in exercise tolerance, uncovering the mechanisms underlying these changes, and whether these changes can impact long-term survival will be the subject of subsequent studies.”

Study participant Danny Robbins said that being part of this study has helped him develop an exercise habit, which he hopes will help him continue to beat lung cancer, as well as combat his high blood pressure and diabetes.

“Before I participated in this study, I struggled with walking in the neighborhood with my wife,” Robbins said. “Now, I exercise five days a week and it’s gotten to the point that I don’t feel like I have to do it; rather, I feel like I don’t want to miss it.”

Source: Duke University

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