

Home-based diet and exercise intervention improves elderly cancer survivors' physical function

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A home-based program to improve exercise and diet led to significant, clinically meaningful improvement in body weight and physical function among older long-term cancer survivors in preliminary findings from the RENEW (Reach-out to ENhanceE Wellness) trial, according to Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, Ph.D., from The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center's Department of Behavioral Science. The data are being presented at the seventh annual American Association for Cancer Research Frontiers in Cancer Prevention Conference.

The trial, funded by the National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Survivorship, included 641 participants. All were 65 or older, had been diagnosed with breast, prostate or colorectal cancer at least five years prior with no evidence of recurrence, were overweight or obese, and had no medical conditions prohibiting moderate exercise.

"We know that when people are diagnosed with cancer they're at risk for comorbid conditions and functional decline," said Demark-Wahnefried. "For those 65 and over, data show they may become debilitated permanently, thus increasing health care costs and taking a toll on family members."

The participant group was divided into 319 who received an intervention and 322 who were waitlisted. Those in the intervention group participated in 15 telephone counseling sessions with a personal trainer

throughout the intervention year, and worked toward establishing several daily goals, including: 1) performing lower body strength exercises; 2) walking 30 minutes; 3) using portion-control plates, cups and bowls; 4) consuming fewer than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat; and 5) eating more fruits and vegetables.

At the end of the year, the group showed improvements in their diet and exercise habits and improved physical function scores. Most significant were notable strength improvements in the participants' legs.

Individuals in the intervention group increased their physical activity to 44.9 minutes per week versus 29.7 minutes per week for the control group. Additionally, the intervention group saw a three percent drop in body weight versus a one percent drop in the control group.

Source: University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center

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