

Muscle mass can make the difference in battling cancer

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Vickie Baracos

(PhysOrg.com) -- Lean muscle-mass may give even obese people an advantage in battling cancer, a University of Alberta study shows.

The study, published in *Lancet Oncology*, provides evidence that varying body compositions of cancer patients likely plays a role in survival rates, activity levels during the illness and potentially, even the reaction to chemotherapy treatment.

Computed tomography images of 250 obese cancer patients were viewed in the study, and findings indicate that people with a condition called sarcopenic obesity-a depletion of lean muscle mass, paired with being

severely overweight-lived an average of 10 months less than their counterparts who were obese, but who had more muscle mass.

They also tended to more often be bedridden and have worse physical function than people who did not have sarcopenic obesity.

"In many cases, people with sarcopenic obesity have as little or sometimes less muscle mass than thin people who look as if they were made of skin and bones," noted Vickie Baracos, a professor of oncology and adjunct professor of human nutrition at the University of Alberta, and lead author on the study.

The findings underscore the importance of including body composition when assessing patient prognosis, Baracos said. Factors like lean muscle-mass could even play a part in how these patients react to chemotherapy, and drug dosing could potentially be improved, she added. "It remains to be proven whether tailored doses of chemotherapy would improve treatment, but that's possible based on what we've seen in this study."

"With obesity reaching new levels, new concepts relating to body weight must be explored," Baracos said. "People's body compositions were less variable in the past and the condition of sarcopenic obesity is a recently recognized phenomenon."

Provided by University of Alberta

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