

Regular physical activity linked to better quality of life in early-stage lung cancer survivors

February 3 2009

Survivors of early-stage lung cancer who take part in regular physical activity have a better quality of life, according to a study in the February issue of the journal *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers and Prevention*, available online now. Patients who are more physically active report better mood, more vigor, and greater physical functioning, the study shows.

"The take-home message is that early-stage lung cancer survivors may benefit, both mentally and physically, from simple moderate exercise," says the paper's lead author Elliot Coups, Ph.D., associate member of Fox Chase Cancer Center's faculty and a participant in the Fox Chase Keystone Program in Cancer Risk and Prevention. "Of course, we're generally not talking marathons here, but smaller, everyday forms of activity like going for a brisk walk several times a week."

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related mortality in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society, and the disease tends to strike older adults who have a history of smoking. Coups and his colleagues studied patients diagnosed with early-stage, non-small cell lung carcinomas. These individuals have a five-year survival rate of nearly 50 percent, compared to three percent for those diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer.

"With early detection and treatment, more people may live longer

following surgery for early-stage lung cancer," Coups says. "For these individuals, the act of surviving cancer will follow them the rest of their days, and we are interested in understanding what we can do to promote their overall health and well-being."

Coups and his colleagues at Fox Chase and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center followed 175 people who had completed surgical treatment for early-stage non-small cell lung cancer within the previous six years. On average, patients were about 68 years old at the time of the study and did not currently have cancer. Patients were asked to estimate their level of physical activity six months before the diagnosis of non-small cell lung cancer, during the six months following surgery and their current activity levels. The survey included standardized questionnaires to assess quality of life in terms of a patient's physical, mental and social well-being.

Approximately one in four participants met physical activity guidelines, which call for about 60 minutes each week of strenuous activity, such as jogging, or 150 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking briskly. Overall, the level of activity for survey participants was comparable to that of the population at large for their age group, Coups says.

Coups and his colleagues also found that those participants who met the guidelines reported fewer depressive symptoms, greater vitality, and less shortness of breath when compared to their more sedentary counterparts.

"Unfortunately, we see that most lung cancer survivors do not meet guidelines set for physical activity, especially in the six months following surgery," Coups says. "While it is certainly understandable that people might not be able to exercise as vigorously as they had done before lung surgery, our study suggests that healthcare providers ought to discuss the potential benefits of moderate physical activity among early-stage lung cancer survivors as a means of increasing their quality of life."

Source: Fox Chase Cancer Center

Citation: Regular physical activity linked to better quality of life in early-stage lung cancer survivors (2009, February 3) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-02-regular-physical-linked-quality-life.html>

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