

How to avoid heart disease and cancer at the same time

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(Medical Xpress) -- Consider it the ultimate health twofer. A new Northwestern Medicine study shows the behaviors and risk factors that reduce the incidence of heart disease also substantially lower the risk of lung, breast, prostate and colon cancers by up to nearly 40 percent.

This is the first study to examine the effect of seven key healthy cardiovascular behaviors and [risk factors](#) on [cancer incidence](#). Those seven measures include a [healthy diet](#), plenty of [physical activity](#), no smoking, healthy body weight and blood pressure and ideal levels of cholesterol and blood sugar. Having just one of them lowered the risk of cancer by 20 percent; and having five to seven of them cut the risk by almost 40 percent.

It's known that some of these individual factors protect against cancer, but no one had ever looked at the cumulative effect of all seven, known as the American Heart Association's (AHA) Life's Simple 7.

The research was presented Nov. 16 at the AHA Scientific Sessions 2011 in Orlando.

“It's a big bonus that a healthy lifestyle not only protects you from cardiovascular disease but also helps you avoid cancer,” said lead investigator Laura Rasmussen-Torvik, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “That awareness should provide extra motivation for people to adopt these behaviors. Even if we remove smoking from our score, we

still see the overall beneficial effect.”

For the study, researchers looked at data from 13,360 participants from the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study, a community-based cohort.

Provided by Northwestern University

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