

## Health woes persist for young cancer survivors: study

June 11 2012, by Kerry Sheridan

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People who survive cancer when they are teenagers or young adults are more likely than their peers who never had cancer to engage in risky behaviors like smoking later on, a US study said Monday.

They also are more likely to be overweight and have [mental health issues](#) and financial problems than their cancer-free counterparts, said the research in the journal *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed publication of the [American Cancer Society](#).

"There are a lot of factors that play into it," said lead author Eric Tai of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Cancer.

"Part of it may be that adolescent and young adult cancer survivors are not aware of their medical history and they are not aware of the long-term risks associated with their cancer and their [cancer treatment](#)," he told AFP.

"Because of that, they may engage in behaviors not knowing the long-term consequences of them."

Also, people diagnosed with cancer between age 15 and 29 are developmentally very different than older cancer survivors, and so they tend to cope with their illnesses in ways that elders might not, he added.

Finally, they are not being tracked by [health care providers](#) as well as younger and older patients.

"There hasn't been very good follow-up of cancer survivors in this group in terms of screening, [health checks](#), those kinds of things looking for early signs of problems that may come up and also looking at [risk behaviors](#)."

The data for the study came from a nationwide survey known as the 2009 [Behavioral Risk Factor](#) Surveillance System (BRFSS).

Researchers identified people who were diagnosed with cancer when they were adolescents or young adults, and compared their responses to questions about their health to a group of 345,592 cancer-free respondents.

A large majority of the young cancer survivors group was female -- 81 percent -- and the most commonly reported type of cancer was cervical (38 percent) followed by other female reproductive cancers (13 percent) and melanoma (nine percent).

The young survivors were more likely to smoke (26 percent compared to 18 percent in the group that never had cancer) and more of them were obese (31 percent versus 27 percent).

Twice as many reported being disabled (36 percent compared to 18 percent) and 24 percent said they were in poor physical health while just 10 percent of the cancer-free group said the same.

Poor mental health was mentioned by 20 percent of young cancer survivors, twice as many as in the control group, and they were also more likely to forgo medical care because of the cost (24 percent versus 15 percent).

Adolescent and young adult cancer survivors also reported higher rates of heart disease, high-blood pressure, asthma and diabetes.

Many of these problems could be avoided with better follow-up care, Tai said.

"Health care providers really need to be aware of established follow-up guidelines, which includes information on potential latent effects, risk factors, screening and evaluation, counseling, and other interventions."

**More information:** "Health Status of Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors." Eric Tai, Natasha Buchanan, Julie Townsend, Temeika Fairley, Angela Moore, and Lisa C. Richardson. *CANCER*; Published Online: June 11, 2012 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.27445)

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Citation: Health woes persist for young cancer survivors: study (2012, June 11) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-health-woes-persist-young-cancer.html>

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