

# Friends and family say doctors should give lifestyle advice to cancer patients

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(Medical Xpress)—Over 80 per cent of cancer patients' close friends and family think that doctors should give their cancer patients lifestyle advice on eating habits, weight-loss and exercise, according to a new study\* published today in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

Cancer Research UK scientists at University College London (UCL) asked over 1200 people who knew someone close with cancer a number of questions to assess their attitudes towards giving [cancer patients lifestyle advice](#).

There has been concern that such information could be seen as insensitive or implying 'blame', particularly at a time when the patient is trying to cope with the stress of [diagnosis](#) or treatment.

They found that around 90 per cent of those closest to cancer patients (their friends and relatives) saw lifestyle advice as 'beneficial' and over 80 per cent believed that doctors had a 'duty' to provide it. They also found that less than 20 per cent felt such advice was 'unnecessary', 'interfering', 'insensitive', or implied 'blame'.

Kate Williams lead author from UCL, said: "Our new research suggests that the friends and family of cancer survivors are much more likely see advice on exercise and [healthy eating](#) as beneficial, rather than insensitive.

"The concern has always been that talking to someone diagnosed with

cancer about changing their eating or [exercise habits](#) could be seen as upsetting and inappropriate by cancer patients or their friends and [family members](#). But we've found that not only are they receptive to the information but most believe it is their doctor's duty to advise them on ways to lead a healthier lifestyle."

The study also examined the attitudes of a smaller number of [cancer survivors](#) (222) to being given lifestyle advice. It found that patients were similarly positive to receiving lifestyle advice with more than 80 per cent believing it would be 'beneficial', 'helpful', 'encouraging' and 'the doctors duty'.

Research shows that cancer patients are at greater risk of developing conditions such as cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and second primary cancers, but this risk can be reduced by leading an active and healthy lifestyle.

Hayley Hardy, 33, from Poole said: "I think it's very important for doctors to give cancer patients advice on leading a healthier lifestyle.

"My husband James was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2006, which was such a shock. It was a wake-up call to both of us to look after ourselves better generally – we realised we had to be here for the kids who will be turning 10 and 13 this year.

"Since then we've both thrown ourselves into a more outgoing lifestyle – we go to the gym regularly and are both training for a London to Brighton cycle challenge in July. I run a Weightwatchers class too, and took part in Race for Life to raise vital research money to help beat this disease."

Sara Hiom, director of patient engagement at Cancer Research UK, said: "This study is encouraging as it suggests that not only patients, but also

their friends and relatives, are open to receiving advice from the doctors about how to lead a healthier lifestyle.

"We know that along with being a non-smoker, keeping a healthy body weight, eating a balanced diet and keeping active are important factors to help us all reduce our risk of developing cancer. For cancer patients, clearly doctors are an important part of setting up a supportive environment where lifestyle changes can be made."

**More information:** Williams, K. et al., Health behaviour advice to cancer patients: the perspective of social network members *British Journal of Cancer*, (2013). [doi: 10.1038/bjc.2013.38](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2013.38)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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