

Keeping active in middle age may help cut breast cancer risk, study shows

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Postmenopausal women who do the highest amount of vigorous exercise could be around a fifth less likely to develop breast cancer than those who put their feet up, according to new findings being presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference today.

The study also showed that women with the most body fat were 55 per cent more likely to develop the disease than the leanest. But being physically active still seemed to help lower [breast cancer](#) risk regardless

of how fat or thin the women were.

The findings are based on a study of nearly 126,000 [postmenopausal women](#) whose [body fat percentage](#) and self-reported physical activity, plus a number of other [lifestyle factors](#), were recorded as part of UK Biobank – a database of medical information and samples for researchers studying how human disease develops.

Around 1,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer in the follow-up period of around three years, allowing the researchers to study the impact of lifestyle factors on them developing the disease over a relatively short time.

Professor Tim Key, a Cancer Research UK scientist from the Cancer Epidemiology Unit at Oxford University, led the study in collaboration with PhD student Wenji Guo.

He said: "We've known for some time that exercise may help to reduce breast cancer risk after the menopause, but what's really interesting about this study is that this does not appear to be solely due to the most active women being slimmer, suggesting that there may be some more direct benefits of exercise for women of all sizes.

"We don't yet know exactly how physical activity reduces [breast cancer risk](#), beyond helping to maintain a healthy weight, but some small studies suggest that it could be linked to the impact on hormone levels in the body."

Alison Cox, Cancer Research UK's director of cancer prevention, said: "This study confirms that the benefits of staying active go beyond just burning calories, sending a clear message to all women about the importance of being physically active throughout life.

"Resources like UK Biobank are providing scientists with greater insights into how our lifestyle choices affect our body's inner workings, helping us to improve and tailor the advice we can offer people to help them reduce their risk of cancer."

In the study, women in the bottom physical activity quartile didn't do any [vigorous physical activity](#), such as running or any activity that made them out of breath, although they may have done some walking and [moderate physical activity](#).

Those in the top [physical activity](#) quartile did an average of at least 15 minutes of vigorous activity every day, such as running, with many doing up to 35 minutes a day, in addition to walking and moderate activity.

More information: [conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/LB023.html](https://www.conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/LB023.html)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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