

Two-thirds of bowel cancer patients aren't advised to exercise despite health benefits

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More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of bowel cancer patients say they weren't advised to exercise regularly after their diagnosis - despite evidence that brisk physical activity is linked to better survival in bowel cancer, according to a Cancer Research UK study published today in *BMJ Open*.

The research, from the Cancer Research UK Health Behaviour Research Centre at UCL (University College London), is the largest study of its kind. More than 15,000 [bowel cancer](#) patients were asked about their current level of [physical activity](#) and whether they were advised to be more active after their diagnosis.

Only a third (31 per cent) of the patients questioned said that they were advised to do physical activity at any point during their treatment. Women, older patients and those from more deprived areas were less likely to say they received advice.

Patients who said they were given advice were more likely to be physically active than those who didn't recall being given this information.

More than a fifth (22 per cent) of bowel cancer patients surveyed did the recommended amount of physical activity a week (around two and a half hours), almost half of patients (45 per cent) did some exercise, but a third did none at all.

Lead author Dr Abi Fisher, senior researcher at the Cancer Research UK Health Behaviour Research Centre at UCL, said: "Our research suggests that advice on being active isn't in place yet, but we believe this should become a part of bowel cancer care. Previous research has shown that doctors can increase their cancer patients' levels of activity by discussing exercise, but they need clear information to ensure this important advice becomes routine.

"We're keen to boost the number of health professionals promoting physical activity by finding simple but effective ways to give this important advice."

NHS guidelines for physical activity recommend that healthy people have at least two and a half hours of [moderate physical activity](#) a week.

Although there are no official clinical guidelines in the UK on giving bowel cancer patients advice on physical activity, several studies show that it is safe and beneficial for most patients.

For those recovering from bowel cancer, physical activity is linked to better survival and reduces the risk of cancer returning. It also reduces cancer-related fatigue, depression, anxiety and is linked to better quality of life for cancer patients.

Martin Ledwick, head cancer information nurse at Cancer Research UK, said: "There's evidence to show that exercise is beneficial and safe for [cancer patients](#). And some studies show that it can even help to speed up recovery after treatment. Patients should discuss exercise with their doctor to make sure it's a safe option and to get advice on exercises to suit their lifestyle and ability."

More information: Fisher et al. Recall of physical activity advice was associated with higher levels of physical activity in colorectal cancer

patients. *BMJ Open*. DOI: [10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006853](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006853)

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