

Cancer may drive health problems as people age

May 9 2016

A new study indicates that cancer may have negative impacts on both the physical and mental health of individuals as they age. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study suggests that cancer increases the risk for certain health issues above and beyond normal aging. This is likely due, in part, to decreased physical activity and stress associated with cancer diagnosis and treatment.

As the population of [older adults](#) grows, it is increasingly important for clinicians to understand the unique impact of cancer on the health of individuals as they age. To investigate, Corinne Leach, MS, PhD, MPH, of the American Cancer Society in Atlanta, and her colleagues analyzed cancer registry data that were linked to Medicare surveys. The analysis included 921 Medicare beneficiaries with a breast, colorectal, lung, or prostate [cancer diagnosis](#) who completed initial surveys in 1998 and 2001 and follow-up surveys two years later. These patients were matched to 4605 controls without cancer.

Cancer groups demonstrated greater declines in activities of daily living and physical function compared with controls, with the greatest change for [lung cancer patients](#). Having a cancer diagnosis increased risk for depression but did not increase the likelihood of developing arthritis, incontinence (except for prostate cancer), or vision/hearing problems. Having a cancer diagnosis also did not exacerbate the severity of arthritis or foot neuropathy.

"This prospective analysis used a propensity score matched control group to cancer cases that enabled us to tease apart the effects of cancer and aging in a novel way," said Dr. Leach. "Decreased physical functioning among older cancer patients compared with older adults without cancer is an important finding for clinicians because it is also actionable. Clinicians need to prepare patients and families for this change in functioning levels and provide interventions that preserve physical function to limit the declines for older [cancer](#) patients."

More information: Is it my cancer or am I just getting older?: Impact of cancer on age-related health conditions of older cancer survivors, *Cancer*, [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.29914](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.29914)

Provided by Wiley

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