

Fitness trackers keep cancer survivors on the move

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A new study shows that activity trackers such as pedometers and smartphone apps are linked to improved step counts and exercise engagement for cancer survivors. The devices have the appeal of being convenient, home-based, and unsupervised, and they may help with accuracy of exercise logs and in some cases can serve as a

communications tool for healthcare teams.

Wilmot Cancer Institute investigators reviewed the outcomes of a dozen different randomized, controlled [clinical trials](#) involving 1,450 [cancer](#) survivors who agreed to participate in the studies evaluating the use of the devices for periods ranging from one to six months. Researchers found that adherence rates were sometimes higher than 70 percent and the trackers had a [positive impact](#) on general fitness and symptoms such as fatigue. The Wilmot study was published by the Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network.

Rather than being sedentary, time spent taking brisk walks or doing other moderate-to-vigorous activity tends to reduce cardiovascular risk factors, helps people manage their weight, and improves strength, endurance, and heart and lung function. This is important because cancer survivors are often at heightened risk for short- and long-term conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, weakened bones, and diabetes.

Examples of devices used in the studies include pedometers, smartphone apps, Wii Fit, and heart rate monitors.

"As technology is increasingly used in the general population in [daily life](#) and in healthcare, the number of ways that digital activity tracking devices can be used to encourage and improve [physical fitness](#) is countless," said senior author Chunkit Fung, M.D., associate professor in Hematology/Oncology at Wilmot and the University of Rochester Medical Center. "Truly, almost everyone can benefit from engaging in exercise; the benefit of exercise spans all ages and health conditions."

Fung's specialty is genitourinary cancers (testicular, prostate, bladder, and kidney), but the patients who participated in the fitness-tracker trials were treated for a wide range of cancers, including breast and leukemia.

The team suggested that future studies should look at cost-effectiveness and develop ideal exercise prescriptions for reducing cancer-related symptoms and improving quality of life for survivors. By 2022, an estimated 18 million [cancer survivors](#) are expected to be alive worldwide.

"With increased survival rates in many cancer types due to the improved therapy, the importance of incorporating exercise into patient care is immense, as exercise interventions can have a positive impact on fitness, activity level, quality of life, and overall well-being," said the study's first author, Kerry Schaffer, M.D., a Hematology/Oncology fellow at Wilmot. She received an American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Merit Award in 2018 for leading the project.

"This research confirms that exercise interventions utilizing digital [activity trackers](#) are a feasible method by which to increase [exercise](#) engagement in the cancer population," Schaffer added.

More information: Kerry Schaffer et al. Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials of Exercise Interventions Using Digital Activity Trackers in Patients With Cancer, *Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network* (2019). [DOI: 10.6004/jnccn.2018.7082](https://doi.org/10.6004/jnccn.2018.7082)

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