

Physical activity may lessen pain intensity for cancer survivors

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People who have had cancer often experience ongoing pain, but a new study reveals that being physically active may help lessen its intensity. The study is published in *Cancer*.

Although physical activity has been shown to lessen various types of [pain](#), its effects on cancer-related pain are unclear. To investigate, a team led by senior author Erika Rees-Punia, Ph.D., MPH, of the American Cancer Society, and first author Christopher T.V. Swain, Ph.D., of the University of Melbourne, in Australia, analyzed information pertaining to 51,439 adults without a history of cancer and 10,651 adults with a past cancer diagnosis.

Participants were asked, "How would you rate your pain on average," with responses ranging from 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain imaginable). Participants were also asked about their usual physical activity.

U.S. guidelines recommend 150 minutes (2 hours 30 minutes) to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour 15 minutes) to 150 minutes (2 hours 30 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity.

Based on participants' responses, the investigators found that, for individuals who had cancer in the past as well as for those without a history of cancer, more physical activity was linked with lower pain intensity. The extent of the association was similar for both groups of individuals, indicating that exercise may reduce cancer-related pain just as it does for other types of pain that have been studied in the past.

Among participants with a past cancer diagnosis, those exceeding physical activity guidelines were 16% less likely to report moderate-to-severe pain compared to those who failed to meet physical activity guidelines. Also, compared with people who remained inactive, those who were consistently active or became active in older adulthood reported less pain.

"It may feel counter-intuitive to some, but [physical activity](#) is an effective, non-pharmacologic option for reducing many types of pain.

As our study suggests, this may include pain associated with [cancer](#) and its treatments," said Dr. Rees-Punia.

More information: Physical activity and pain in people with and without cancer, *Cancer* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.35208](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.35208).
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