

Exercise can help cancer patients, but few oncologists suggest it

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Numerous studies have shown the powerful effect that exercise can have on cancer care and recovery. For patients who have gone through breast or colon cancer treatment, regular exercise has been found to reduce recurrence of the disease by up to 50 percent. But many cancer patients are reluctant to exercise, and few discuss it with their oncologists, according to a Mayo Clinic study published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*.

"As doctors, we often tell patients that exercise is important, but to this point, nobody had studied what patients know about exercise, how they feel about it and what tends to get in the way," says lead author Andrea Cheville, M.D., of Mayo Clinic's Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

The study is part of a series of investigations looking at [exercise habits](#) among cancer patients. Researchers found that patients who exercised regularly before their diagnosis were more likely to exercise than those who had not. Many patients considered daily activities, such as gardening, sufficient exercise.

"There was a real sense of 'What I do every day, that's my exercise,'" says Dr. Cheville, noting that most patients didn't realize daily activities tend to require minimal effort. "Most were not aware that inactivity can contribute to weakening of the body and greater vulnerability to problems, including symptoms of cancer."

In addition, researchers found that patients took [exercise advice](#) most seriously when it came directly from their oncologists, but none of those studied had discussed it with them.

"Generally, patients are not being given concrete advice about exercise to help them maintain functionality and to improve their outcomes," Dr. Cheville says.

Exercise can improve patients' mobility, enable them to enjoy activities and keep them from becoming isolated in their homes. It can contribute to overall feelings of strength and physical safety, ease cancer-related fatigue and improve sleep. The researchers plan to investigate how to make the message about exercise meaningful to patients to optimize symptom relief and enhance recovery.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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