Script – Print – Moving On From a Sedentary Lifestyle

Study Suggests Cancer Survivors Need More Activity

It's no secret that leading a sedentary lifestyle can be detrimental to a person's health in a number of ways – it increases the risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, depression and more. A lack of regular activity is equally harmful for cancer survivors as well.

Cancer survivors who sit more than eight hours of the day are five times more likely to die over the following years than cancer survivors who sit less, according to a study done at Alberta Health Services in Calgary, Canada, and published in *JAMA Oncology*.

The study highlighted 1,500 cancer survivors with more than half of the participants (57%) being inactive, and reporting no physical activity in the past week. The study found that more than one-third of cancer survivors reported sitting for six to eight hours each day, and one-quarter admitted to sitting for more than eight hours per day.

During a nine-year period, 293 of the cancer survivors died -- 114 from cancer, 41 from heart diseases, and 138 from other causes. Researchers found the risk of dying from any cause or cancer was about 65% lower in cancer survivors who were physically active compared to those who were less active.

"I think when you are diagnosed with cancer it seems as if your world stops and you think that if you sit it's not going to progress or maybe you're going to feel better, which is so contrary to what we should be doing," says Peggy Rogers, a nurse practitioner in Genetics and Medical Oncology, for OSF HealthCare. "We know the body can take a lot more exercise than we think we're able to do."

The American Cancer Society recommends that cancer survivors follow the same physical activity guidance as the general public. The goal is 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity or 75 to 150 minutes of intense activity each week (or a combination of the two).

Rogers agrees.

"Cancer survivors are obviously deconditioned post treatment and need to build up their strength. Continuing to sit obviously does nothing for your core strength, it doesn't help build muscle mass, it just continues to weaken, and fatigue is a huge problem for many patients post treatment. It also doesn't help fight fatigue by continuing to sit."

Rogers recommends several different ways to become more active. Some tips include joining a gym, swimming, cleaning the house or finding a hobby you enjoy such as gardening.

"Walking is easy to do," says Rogers. "Sometimes you have to start at 10 minutes a week and work your way up to 30. It's small goals to try to get to bigger ones."

But exercise is just one way to make improvements to your overall health.

"Certainly there are people who are deconditioned from other health problems – smoking being one of them – so we work really hard on lifestyle management as well; diet and exercise are huge," says Rogers. "Sometimes we have to control the eating that we have done. Maybe it wasn't as healthy as it needed to be. We talk a lot about making positive choices to get you through treatment."

The key, Rogers adds, is to sit less and to move more and more often. The caveat, however, is some survivors battle other issues such as arthritis, for example, that may hamper their ability to become more active. When in doubt, consult with your physician about the best way to incorporate more physical movement into your daily routine.

For more information on diet, exercise and cancer risk, click here.