

# PHYSICAL & ACTIVITY & cancer

When it comes to cancer prevention, physical activity may not be the first thing that comes to mind. Sedentary activities such as using computers, watching television, and playing video games are more popular; and conveniences such as elevators, escalators, and drive-throughs, have reduced our daily activity levels. While being inactive today is not an immediate threat to your health, the long term consequences are real. In fact, poor diet and physical inactivity has been identified as the second leading actual cause of death in the United States, following tobacco use (American Medical Association, 2004).

## Why Should I Be Physically Active?

Physical activity has health benefits for the body, mind, and spirit. Physical activity has been shown to help protect against:

- Heart attacks and stroke
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Obesity
- Depression, anxiety, and stress
- Certain cancers

Recent cancer research shows clear evidence supporting the role that physical activity has in reducing the risk of colon, breast, and prostate cancer.

## Convincing Evidence:

Colon Cancer – Physical activity improves the movement of what we eat and drink through our gut, and therefore reduces the amount of time that it is exposed to cancer causing agents. There is an estimated 50% reduced risk of colon cancer for those who are the most active compared to those who are the least active.



# FOCUS CANCER

## Convincing Evidence:

Breast Cancer – Being physically active can help reduce overall body fat, which reduces the amount of fat-produced estrogen (a hormone) in our body. The greater exposure a woman has to estrogen over a lifetime is linked with a greater risk of breast cancer. In fact, the most physically active women are 30-40% less likely to develop breast cancer than those who are less active.

## Probable Evidence:

Prostate Cancer – The link between physical activity and reduced risk of prostate cancer is not as strong as the link with colon cancer and breast cancer. However, being physically active results in lower levels of free testosterone (a hormone) in our body. An increased lifetime exposure to testosterone has been linked to prostate cancer. Several studies have shown a decreased prostate cancer risk of 10-30% in men who were most physically active.

## What are the physical activity recommendations for reducing cancer risk?

Health Canada recommends getting 60 minutes of physical activity every day to stay healthy or improve your health. For activities that are moderate to vigorous in effort, such as swimming or jogging, the recommendation decreases to 30 minutes, 4 days per week. While moderate levels of physical activity have been shown to reduce the risk of certain cancers, recent research suggests that more is even better (excluding extreme levels). The general recommendation for cancer prevention is at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity, 5-7 days per week (World Cancer Research Fund, 2007).



### → Did you know?

In 1992, the first CIBC Run for the Cure to support the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation took place in Toronto with 1,500 participants and raised \$85,000 for breast cancer research, education, and awareness. In 2008, there were 170,000 participants in 55 communities across Canada and \$28.5 million was raised!



## Physical Exercise Across the Cancer Experience (PEACE)

New research is showing that being physically active can have a positive impact during other points in the cancer experience including detection of cancer, coping during cancer treatment, rehabilitation after treatment, and survival.

### Detection

Research has shown that anxiety is an important barrier to cancer screening. Reduced levels of anxiety that result from being physically active can increase the number of people who undergo cancer screening procedures.

### Buffering

Being physically active before treatment begins may boost both physical and mental functioning, which results in better preparation for treatment.

### Coping and Recovery

Evidence has shown that those who are able to be physically active during treatment function better and have a higher quality of life.

### Survival

Leading a physically active lifestyle may improve immune function and reduce the risk of developing future cancer.

Considering the many health benefits associated with leading an active lifestyle and the evidence linking physical activity and reduced cancer risk; the message is clear. Physical activity should be an important part of our daily lives. Take action today. Make a plan and a commitment to leading a more active lifestyle.



### KEY REFERENCES

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