

Exercising to Prevent Cancer

Cancer Facts & Stats: August 2021



20-40 Mins



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After a turbulent year and a half, many of us have experienced changes in our exercise habits. As you settle into new exercise routines, it can be useful to keep in mind that physical activity has a big impact on your risk of cancer.

20 to 40 minutes of medium-intensity physical activity each day has been linked to a lower chance of developing multiple types of cancer.^{1,2} Throughout the week, it is a good idea to do a mix of heart-rate-raising and muscle-building activities.²

In Canada, about half of all cancer diagnoses each year involve either breast, prostate, colorectal, or lung cancer. In 2020, an average of about 300 people were expected to be diagnosed every day with one of these types of cancer.³

Below is a summary of what we know about the effects of exercise on each of these most-diagnosed cancers.

Breast Cancer

Women who are most active are about **10% to 15% less likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer compared to women who are least active.**⁴

In fact, the more time a woman spends exercising, the lower her chances of developing breast cancer become.⁴

Women who are more active before or after being diagnosed with breast cancer live longer than women with breast cancer who are less active before or after their diagnosis.¹

IN 2015, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT 1800, OR

1 in 10

BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSES WERE ATTRIBUTABLE TO MODERATE OR LOW LEVELS OF EXERCISE⁵



Prostate Cancer

Being active doesn't mean a man will be less likely to develop prostate cancer, **but many years of exercise may lower his risk of diagnosis with aggressive prostate cancer.**⁶

Additionally, being overweight or obese might increase a man's risk of aggressive forms of the disease.⁷

Men who are active after being diagnosed with prostate cancer may have a lower probability of dying from the disease.⁶

Colorectal Cancer

People who are most active are about **10% to 20% less likely to be diagnosed with colon cancer compared to those who are least active.**¹

Exercise might provide additional protection from colorectal cancer in people who are overweight.⁸

People who are physically active after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer are at about 30% to 50% lower risk of dying than people who are less active.¹

IN 2015, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT 1300, OR

1 in 10

COLON CANCER DIAGNOSES WERE ATTRIBUTABLE TO MODERATE OR LOW LEVELS OF EXERCISE⁵



IN 2015, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT 2900, OR

1 in 10

LUNG CANCER DIAGNOSES WERE ATTRIBUTABLE TO MODERATE OR LOW LEVELS OF EXERCISE⁵



Lung Cancer

Current and former smokers who are most physically active are about **15% to 30% less likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer compared to current and former smokers who are least physically active.**⁹

We don't have enough evidence yet to know whether exercise lowers the chances that a person who has never smoked will develop lung cancer.⁹

References

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