

Your Nutrition Connection



This publication provides information on physical activity and your health, including breast cancer risk

Physical Activity and Breast Cancer Risk

What is physical activity?

Any activity that gets your body moving is physical activity. Walking your kids to school, gardening, vacuuming, climbing stairs, lifting groceries, mowing the lawn, riding your bike, yoga, dancing, going to a gym and playing a sport are great ways to add more physical activity to your life. There are three types of physical activities: endurance, flexibility, and strength. Your body needs each type of activity for good health.

ENDURANCE ACTIVITIES: are great for your heart, lungs, and circulation (blood flow). Activities such as walking, riding your bike, skating, swimming, tennis, rowing, skiing, running, gardening, hiking, volleyball, badminton and rowing will promote your health if you do them 4 to 7 days a week.

FLEXIBILITY ACTIVITIES: stretch and bend your muscles and joints to help keep them in good shape. Activities that increase your flexibility include sweeping, gardening, golfing, yoga, T'ai Chi, vacuuming, making a bed, dancing, and washing a car. Try to do this type of activity 4 to 7 days a week.

STRENGTH ACTIVITIES: strengthen muscles and bones by providing resistance against which your muscles must push or pull. Strength building activities include carrying small children, groceries, packages, or a backpack, brief case, or large purse, walking up stairs, raking and carrying leaves, lifting weights, doing sit ups or pushups, and shovelling snow or dirt. This type of activity will help your health if you do it 2 to 4 days a week.

What are the health effects of physical activity?

BONE HEALTH

Your body builds bone when you engage in weight-bearing actions, such as carrying books or groceries, lifting small children, and pushing lawn mowers, strollers or shopping carts. These strengthening activities help keep your bones (and muscles) strong and also reduce the risk of broken bones if you fall. In children, these activities make bones stronger; in adults, these activities slow down the rate at which bone is lost.

OBESITY

While there are many causes of obesity, regular physical activity and healthy eating can help you reach, and keep, your healthy body weight. Balance and moderation are important parts of healthy eating. Enjoying foods from all four food groups on Canada's Food Guide will help you achieve balance. The serving sizes shown on Canada's Food Guide will guide you in moderating how much food you eat. When excess body weight leads to obesity, your chronic disease risk increases.

DIABETES

Physical activity reduces the chance of having excess body weight, which is linked to higher Type 2 diabetes risk. A lack of physical activity is linked to higher risk for Type 2 diabetes.

HEART HEALTH

Regular physical activity lowers your heart disease risk by:

- improving the health of your heart and blood vessels
- lowering blood triglyceride levels
- raising blood levels of high density lipoproteins (HDL)
- lowering blood pressure

MENTAL HEALTH

Being physically active may improve your ability to cope with stress, reduce anxiety, improve your mood, and help you feel good about yourself.

Physical activity and cancer risk

In 2007, experts at the World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research reviewed the research on food, nutrition, physical activity, and cancer risk. You can read their detailed report online at http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=res_report_second. Here are summaries of their findings for physical activity and breast, colon, and endometrial cancer:

BREAST CANCER—BEFORE MENOPAUSE

Since breast cancer risk is hormone related, the factors that affect it differ among pre-menopausal and post-menopausal women. Studies looking at the effects of physical activity on breast cancer risk among pre-menopausal women have reported mixed results. Until more research is done, we cannot say for sure whether or not there is a link between physical activity and breast cancer risk among pre-menopausal women. The best advice for pre-menopausal women is to enjoy regular physical activity for its overall health benefits.

BREAST CANCER—AFTER MENOPAUSE

There is good evidence that higher levels of regular physical activity may reduce breast cancer risk among post-menopausal women. The post-menopausal women who took part in this research did 7 or more hours of vigorous physical activity each week. The more these women exercised, the lower their breast cancer risk.

COLON CANCER

There is strong proof that regular physical activity reduces colon cancer risk. As you increase the intensity (from light to moderate to vigorous) of your activity and the number of times each week that you are active, your risk of colon cancer is likely to decrease.

ENDOMETRIAL CANCER

There is good evidence linking higher levels of physical activity with lower risk of endometrial cancer.

What is “moderate” physical activity?

When done for 30 to 60 minutes at a time, brisk walking, dancing, raking leaves, swimming, water aerobics, housework or yard work, and biking are moderate physical activities.

What is “vigorous” physical activity?

Fast walking, dancing, running, aerobics, swimming, soccer, tennis, heavy housework or yard work, skiing, and biking are vigorous physical activities. Vigorous activities are done at a faster pace than moderate activities and make your heart and lungs work harder for at least 20 to 30 minutes at a time.

What does this mean for you?

Experts agree that regular physical activity is the best way to reduce your overall cancer risk. If you are not used to being active, have a health issue, are pregnant or breastfeeding speak with your doctor before starting new activities.

Enjoying regular physical activity will help you lose body fat, gain more muscle, and achieve your healthy body weight. As you gain strength, your endurance level will rise and your overall risk of injury will decline. It will give you more energy, help you cope with stress, give you fun activities to do with family and friends, and increase your feelings of wellbeing.

How much physical activity do you need?

As you will see below, expert advice on how much and how often we need to be active varies a bit.

The experts who reviewed the research on physical activity and cancer risk advise that adults should begin with 30 minutes of moderate activity daily, such as biking, walking quickly, or heavy yard work. Over time, you should build up to 60 minutes of moderate activity or 30 minutes (or more) of vigorous activity every day.

Health Canada created Canada’s Physical Activity Guide for Healthy Active Living based on a review of the research linking physical activity to lower overall disease risk. Canada’s

Physical Activity Guide for adults recommends that you begin with 60 minutes of light physical activity daily, such as easy gardening or stretching. As your fitness improves, build up to 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Work towards 30 minutes of vigorous activity at least 5 times a week.

The bottom line

Try to work your way up to 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least 5 times a week.

For your copy of Canada’s Physical Activity Guide, go to the Health Canada website (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index_e.html).

You don’t need to lose weight. Should you still be physically active?

Yes. Current research reports that regular physical activity, at the level suggested above, may reduce breast cancer risk even if you do not lose weight.

You’ve never been very active. Is it too late to start?

It’s never too late to start being more physically active. Research shows that women who start exercising after menopause can still lower their breast cancer risk. Find an activity that you enjoy and can do without aggravating any health issues you may have—you don’t have to join a gym to be more active. Consult your doctor before starting any new physical activities—he or she may also be able to suggest activities that would be suitable for you.



Looking for ways to be more active?

- Find a friend or family member to walk, ride, skate, dance, or play with you.
- Every step counts: get a pedometer (a small gadget that counts your footsteps). Experts recommend that you work your way up to taking 10,000 steps each day. When you have reached that goal, try to make 2,000 to 4,000 of these steps brisk ones.
- Check your local newspapers for classes offered by school boards, recreation centres, and private companies.
- Talk to coworkers about opportunities for physical activity at or near your workplace.
- For ideas on how to get moving during your work day, see the Centre for Active Living website at <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/>.
- Check your phone directory for parks, fitness and sports clubs.
- Winter activities, such as skiing, skating, hockey, tobogganing, and building snowmen let you enjoy the outdoors while getting and staying fit. If you don't want to brave the cold, check your local indoor mall to see if mall walking is permitted before, during, or after store hours.
- To find activities in your area, visit the Active 2010 website at <http://www.active2010.ca/>, operated by the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion. Look for "What's out there for you?"
- Buy an exercise video. See reviews at www.consumersearch.com.

*To contact a Registered Dietitian, call the Patient & Family Support Program
Odette Cancer Centre, at 416-480-4623*

Helpful Resources

- Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation and Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/index.html>.
- Government of Ontario. Active Living 2010: <http://www.active2010.ca>.
- Health Canada. Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index_e.html.
- Public Health Agency of Canada. Healthy Living Unit: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/>.
- World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Food, nutrition, physical activity, and the prevention of cancer: A global perspective. Washington, DC: AICR, 2007. Available at http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=res_report_second.
- For podcasts, videos, and other downloadable nutrition information visit ync.sunnybrook.ca.

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