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Men's Fitness in Middle Age Protects against Developing and Dying from Cancer Later in Life [1]

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In a large, 20-year study, researchers found that men with a high level of fitness at middle age have a lower risk of developing and dying from lung and colorectal cancers. They also found that better fitness lowers the risk of dying of prostate cancer.

As part of this study, researchers looked at the results of a fitness assessment included in a preventive health check-up for 17,049 men around age 50. For this fitness test, the men were asked to walk on a treadmill while both the speed and incline were increased, making it more difficult over time. How long each man could stay on the treadmill was recorded using a standard measurement for fitness, called metabolic equivalents or METs.

To find out whether these men developed or died of lung, colorectal, or prostate cancer later in their lives, researchers looked at information collected from Medicare. In the 20 to 25 years after the fitness assessment, 2,332 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer, 276 were diagnosed with colorectal cancer, and 277 were diagnosed with lung cancer. In addition, 347 of the men died of cancer and 159 of heart disease.

Researchers found that the men who were most fit were 68% less likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer and 38% less likely to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer compared with those who were the least fit. Researchers also found that the men who were more fit who did develop lung, colorectal, or prostate cancer were less likely to die of the disease than those who were less fit, with even a small improvement in fitness lowering the risk of dying of cancer by 14%. The study also showed that those who were less fit still had an increased risk of cancer and heart disease, even if they were not obese.

What this means for patients

“While poor fitness is already known to predict future heart disease, this is the first study to explore fitness as a marker of future cancer risk,” said lead study author Susan Lakoski, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Vermont. “This finding makes it clear that

patients should be advised that they need to achieve a certain fitness level, and not just be told that they need to exercise. It's important to remember that fitness level depends on age and gender. If you are looking to improve your fitness, talk with your doctor before starting any new exercise program.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- Do I have a high risk for any specific types of cancer?
- What steps can I take to help reduce my risk of cancer?
- Do I currently have a good level of fitness? How is this measured?
- Do I need to improve my fitness? If so, can you provide resources or a referral to help me with an exercise plan?

For More Information

[Cancer.Net Guides to Cancer](#) [2] [3]

[Physical Activity and Cancer Risk](#) [4]

[Physical Activity: Suggestions and Tips](#) [5]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/men%E2%80%99s-fitness-middle-age-protects-against-developing-and-dying-cancer-later-life>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/risk-factors-and-prevention/physical-activity/physical-activity-and-cancer-risk>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24995>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24996>