

PRESS RELEASE

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KEEPING ACTIVE IN MIDDLE AGE MAY HELP CUT BREAST CANCER RISK, STUDY SHOWS

POSTMENOPAUSAL WOMEN who do the highest amount of vigorous exercise could be around a fifth less likely to develop breast cancer than those who put their feet up, according to new findings being presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference today (Monday)*.

The study also showed that women with the most body fat were 55 per cent more likely to develop the disease than the leanest. But being physically active still seemed to help lower breast cancer risk regardless of how fat or thin the women were.

The findings are based on a study of nearly 126,000 postmenopausal women whose body fat percentage and self-reported physical activity, plus a number of other lifestyle factors, were recorded as part of UK Biobank – a database of medical information and samples for researchers studying how human disease develops.

Around 1,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer in the follow-up period of around three years, allowing the researchers to study the impact of lifestyle factors on them developing the disease over a relatively short time.

Professor Tim Key, a Cancer Research UK scientist from the Cancer Epidemiology Unit at Oxford University, led the study in collaboration with PhD student Wenji Guo.

He said: “We’ve known for some time that exercise may help to reduce breast cancer risk after the menopause, but what’s really interesting about this study is that this does not appear to be solely due to the most active women being slimmer, suggesting that there may be some more direct benefits of exercise for women of all sizes.

“We don’t yet know exactly how physical activity reduces breast cancer risk, beyond helping to maintain a healthy weight, but some small studies suggest that it could be linked to the impact on hormone levels in the body.”

Alison Cox, Cancer Research UK’s director of cancer prevention, said: “This study confirms that the benefits of staying active go beyond just burning calories, sending a clear message to all women about the importance of being physically active throughout life.

“Resources like UK Biobank are providing scientists with greater insights into how our lifestyle choices affect our body’s inner workings, helping us to improve and tailor the advice we can offer people to help them reduce their risk of cancer.”

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Simon Shears in the NCRI press office on 020 3469 8054 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to editors

* Wenji Guo, Gillian Reeves and Tim Key, Body fat percentage, physical activity and breast cancer risk in 126,000 postmenopausal women in UK Biobank.



Conference abstract: <http://conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/2014/abstracts/LB023.html>

In the study, women in the bottom physical activity quartile didn't do any vigorous physical activity, such as running or any activity that made them out of breath, although they may have done some walking and moderate physical activity.

Those in the top physical activity quartile did an average of at least 15 minutes of vigorous activity every day, such as running, with many doing up to 35 minutes a day, in addition to walking and moderate activity.

About the NCRi

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRi) is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry. Its role is to promote cooperation in cancer research.
- NCRi Partners are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Children with Cancer UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Prostate Cancer UK; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); Worldwide Cancer Research (formerly the Association for International Cancer Research); Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.
- For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

About the NCRi Cancer Conference

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRi) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research.
- The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world-leading experts from all cancer research disciplines.
- The tenth NCRi Cancer Conference is taking place from 2–5 November 2014 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool.
- For more information visit conference.ncri.org.uk