

The Positive Role of Physical Activity in Cancer Prevention

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We tend to think of exercise as relevant only to our cardiovascular health. In my practice I am constantly aware of, and counseling to, the role exercise also plays in one's overall health, sleep, mood, blood sugar and hormone balancing.

Now two studies published in the May 2006 journal of *Carcinogenesis* have shown the positive ramifications of exercise in bowel and skin cancer prevention. These studies have also identified the mechanisms that could be responsible for this effect.

Both studies were done with mice. One study found that female mice that had 24-hour access to running wheels and were exposed to ultraviolet light took longer to develop skin tumors, developed fewer and smaller tumors and had decreased body fat ratios compared to mice that did not have access to running wheels.

The theory being considered in this study is that apoptosis (programmed cell death) is triggered by exercise. The follow-up lab work is indicating that although the ultraviolet light triggers the development of tumors, exercise is counteracting the effect by stimulating the death of developing cancer cells.

The second study looked at the combined effect of exercise on the running wheel along with a restricted diet on the development of pre-cancerous polyps in the intestines of male mice. The data in this study points to voluntary exercise that brings on a negative energy balance (more calories out than in) protects against the onset of cancer in these mice.

Whether exercise decreases sunlight-induced cancers in humans has yet to be demonstrated in research. In the case of bowel cancer, however, evidence from population studies do correlate that physically active people have a reduced risk of developing the disease.

"The protective effect of exercise and lower body weight in our mice is consistent with epidemiological evidence in humans that suggests higher levels of activity and lower body weight reduces the risk of colon cancer," writes the lead author of this study, Dr. Lisa Colbert.

It is interesting in reading the studies to note that the running wheel and the exercise the mice received from it was consistently referred to as "voluntary". No one was forcing these mice to run. It came out of their natural connection with their body.

We too need that movement. It is our natural inclination and our body calls for movement as part of its self-care. We are blessed here in Telluride in that our surroundings lure us to be active. Even with that it is easy to find work often keeping us from participating.

Exercise is a choice and it is up to each of us to make it a priority. If you are finding it a challenge to fit it into your day, use my counsel as your excuse (“hey boss...my health coach says I have to”), prevention of cancer as your impetus or just let the beauty of nature ensnare you into a good habit and feel good about it.

One study published last May (2005) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that exercise improved survival among women who had breast cancer by 20 percent even if they walked as little as an hour a week. Those who walked three to five hours per week had a risk of death 50 percent lower than those who got little or no exercise.

Exercise guru Jack LaLanne had it right years ago when he claimed, “exercise and no man-made foods are the key to health”. May the trails of Telluride be one of your running wheels.

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