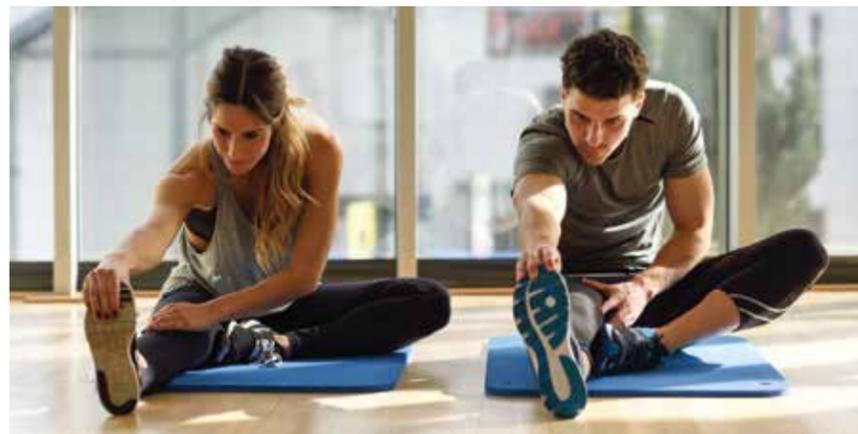


Reduce Colon Cancer Risk with Exercise

Modifiable risk factors, such as a sedentary lifestyle, lack of exercise, poor diet, excess body weight, high alcohol intake, and tobacco use, contribute significantly to colon cancer. In contrast, physical activity is a protective measure that can significantly reduce the risk of colon cancer. One of the most extensive meta-analyses shows that even moderate-intensity exercise for 30-60 minutes a day can help reduce the risk of colon cancer by up to 25 per cent. Understanding that benefits of exercise extend beyond heart health and weight loss is vital. Exercise also helps reduce stress, enhance intestinal motility, and promote the production of beneficial compounds by the body that plays a crucial role in reducing colon cancer risk. The exercise can even benefit those undergoing chemotherapy by reducing physical fatigue, enhancing the quality of life, and increasing lifespan.

Saint-Vil, Medical Director, Sports Medicine Department, Marietta Memorial Hospital



Heart diseases and cancer are among the top two leading causes of mortality in the US. Though most people realise the benefits of physical activity in preventing heart

attack, stroke, and diabetes, they barely recognise that regular exercise may also help significantly reduce cancer risk.

It is vital to understand that those living with poor metabolic health are also at greater cancer risk. Thus, for example,

studies suggest that a sedentary lifestyle and excessive body weight are among significant contributors to cancer risk.

Colon cancer is a relatively common cancer type. It is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the US. Every year, more than 100,000 individuals are diagnosed with colon cancer in the US. It is estimated that in 2023, colon cancer will cause more than 50,000 deaths in the US.

Understanding colon cancer risk factors

To lower the risk of colon cancer, it is vital to understand its risk factors. Moreover, it is vital to understand that lifestyle interventions can prevent colon cancer in many instances.

Some non-modifiable colon cancer risk factors are family history and certain genetic syndromes like familial adenomatous polyposis.

However, it is more important to understand modifiable risk factors. Some of the lifestyle choices known to increase colon cancer risk considerably are:

- **Sedentary lifestyle** – those who sit for long hours and do not engage in many physical activities are especially at risk.
- **A diet low in fruits and vegetables** – a diet rich in dietary fibre, antioxidants, and vitamins may lower cancer risk. Additionally, plant-based foods also contain phytochemicals known to suppress cancer growth.
- **Overweight and obesity.**
- **High alcohol intake and tobacco use.**
- **A diet high in fats and low in dietary fibre** – remember that excessive intake of fats causes an increase in body weight, influences intestinal motility, and causes low-grade inflammation. On the other hand, dietary fibre

can enhance intestinal motility and may also positively influence gut microbiota.

Get active, and start exercising to minimise colon cancer risk

The National Institute of Cancer states that two effective ways of reducing your colon cancer risk are by reducing your exposure to risk factors and taking protective measures. And lifestyle changes like dietary measures and exercise are among the most effective protective measures.

Protective measures like exercise are essential, considering that many risk factors, like genetics are non-modifiable. In addition, many individuals have a sedentary lifestyle due to the nature of their job. For example, many need to work hours in front of the screen. In most cases, people cannot change their profession. However, they can exercise to counter prolonged sitting sessions' side effects.

The benefits of exercise in cancer prevention cannot be underrated, especially considering that exercise will help reduce the risk of not just cancer but other non-communicable diseases like heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and even mental health issues.

It is also vital to understand that you don't have to spend hours exercising each day. Even some exercise can be highly beneficial. It appears that the benefits of exercise in colon cancer are experienced in a dose-dependent manner. It means that the more you exercise, the greater would be the benefit. It also means that even some exercise can help significantly.

Therefore, starting with something like 30 minutes of exercise a day, five times a week, is a good idea. One can begin with low-intensity exercises like walking and gradually increase exercise intensity and duration.

What kind of exercise is good for colon cancer prevention?

This is one of the common questions. Well, just any kind of exercise is good for

reducing your cancer risk. However, for maximum benefit, engage in moderate-intensity exercise for 30-60 minutes daily. Some good examples of moderate-intensity exercises are walking briskly, swimming, and even gardening.

How much can colon cancer risk be reduced through exercise?

It is good to know that exercise can reduce colon cancer risk. However, most people would like to know how much colon cancer risk reduction is possible through regular exercise. After all, any effort must be worth it. Well, studies suggest that regular exercise can help reduce colon cancer risk by one-fourth in almost everyone. However, that is an average. It means that some may benefit more significantly; thus, in some, exercise may even help cut down colon cancer risk by half!

In 2009, researchers carried out the most extensive meta-analysis to date. They analysed more than 500 published studies for colon cancer prevention and ultimately included 52 studies in their meta-analysis. They found that regular exercise, on average, can help reduce colon cancer risk by 24 per cent in both genders. These benefits can be even much higher when combined with other measures.

Therefore, remember that exercise reduces colon cancer risk dose-dependently. Hence, the more you

exercise (regularly), the greater the benefits.

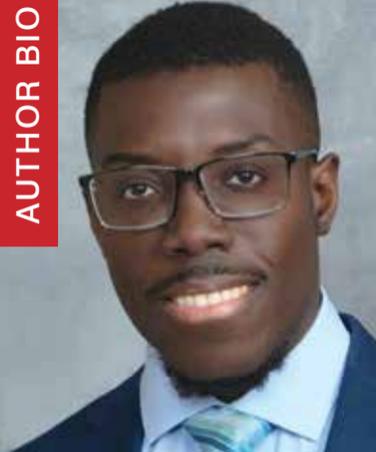
But what if someone has already been diagnosed with colon cancer? Can exercise help? Yes, studies show that exercise boosts the body's production of insulin-like growth factors, prostaglandins, and other peptides that may increase the quality of life of those living with colon cancer.

It is also worth understanding that one can even benefit from exercise when undergoing chemotherapy. Studies show that exercise can help reduce physical fatigue, enhance the quality of life, and even increase lifespan.

Thus, it is time for people to realise that exercise benefits extend beyond heart health or weight loss. Exercise reduces stress, enhances intestinal motility, increases the release of beneficial compounds, and helps fight cancer, not just colon cancer.

Studies show that the benefits of exercise can be massive. If combined with other measures like dietary changes, adequate sleep, and stress management, it may even help reduce the risk of colon cancer by more than half. Exercise may be considered the most effective way to prevent colon cancer. Moreover, these are not just comprehensions; clinical studies confirm these benefits. ■

References are available at www.asianhbm.com



AUTHOR BIO

Saint-Vil is the founder of the ExerciseNow.org platform and the Medical Director of the Sports Medicine department at Marietta Memorial Hospital. He is a fellowship-trained Sports Medicine physician and a published researcher who has published countless articles promoting healthy lifestyles on Sports Medicine and fitness-related topics. He believes exercise is the best health insurance. Among his academic interests is Platelet Rich Plasma's use to regenerate tendons, ligaments, cartilage, and other soft tissues.