

New Lifestyle Guidelines for Cancer Survivors

Diet, exercise, and alcohol consumption impact longevity and quality of life.

Cancer survivors, take note: the American Cancer Society (ACS) has news to help you live longer and stronger. It has been more than 10 years since the ACS released its health guidelines. There are now several updates included in the Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Survivors published in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.

Tracy Crane, Ph.D., RDN, a co-author of these published guidelines, is the co-lead for the Cancer Control Research Program, and the director of Lifestyle Medicine and Digital Health for Cancer Survivorship at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, and an associate professor in medical oncology at the Miller School of Medicine.

The ACS selected Dr. Crane, also a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN), as one of its co-authors for her nearly 20 years of experience in cancer control and lifestyle medicine. She brings a wealth of experience and a robust research program that is advancing the science of cancer prevention to improve health outcomes and quality of life for cancer survivors and the community, using food and exercise as medicine.

"Ideally, clinicians will use these updated guidelines to communicate with patients about diet, physical activity, and body composition recommendations to optimize health outcomes. One major gap in care discovered while reviewing evidence for these guidelines is that many cancer survivors are not routinely screened for their nutrition status and physical function."

"This is one area where cancer care could improve, with clinicians routinely screening and referring patients to RDNs and exercise physiologists to prevent or resolve health issues around nutrition, activity, and body composition," Dr. Crane says.

Among the ACS guidelines, three stand out:

Physical activity:

The biggest change from the old guidelines is that recommendations are more specific regarding cardiovascular, strength, balance, and flexibility exercise. Cancer survivors are advised to maintain or increase muscle mass through regular physical activity.

Aim for 150-300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity or 75-150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity physical activity. Add muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week.

Children and teens need one hour per day of moderate or vigorous activity.

Simply stated: Move more, sit less.

And while weight is important, body composition is of greater importance.



Diet:

To prevent malnutrition, patients should maintain a healthy weight, follow a regular eating pattern, and eat a well-balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, whole (unrefined) grains, and fiber-rich beans and peas.

Limit or avoid red and processed meats, sugary beverages, and highly processed products.

Don't know where to start? Ask your oncologist to refer you to a dietitian familiar with the unique needs of cancer survivors. With proper guidance, you can navigate treatment-related side effects that cause malnutrition and loss of muscle mass.

Alcohol intake:

Living an alcohol-free life helps prevent some cancers from recurring and other new cancers from developing.

There's enough evidence now to encourage cancer survivors to abstain.

If you do drink, the guidelines advise limiting your intake to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women.

"The biggest takeaway from these updated guidelines is that every little bit helps improve health outcomes, whether you've never had cancer, are currently in treatments, or are a long-term survivor. Choosing even one small area of these guidelines to form a health goal and beginning to make small, daily changes can have a large long-term impact on your health and quality of life," Dr. Crane says.

To schedule an appointment with Sylvester's Survivorship Services, call 305-243-4922.

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