



MEDIA RELEASE

15 November 2016

Exercise: a new medicine for cancer survivors

New research to be presented at a cancer conference on the Gold Coast today (15 November) shows that high intensity exercise helps cancer survivors overcome fatigue. The new finding contradicts previous medical advice that primarily focused on rest or low-to-moderate intensity physical activity.

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting will also feature expert presentations that show that physical activity could help cancer survivors reduce their risk of cancer recurrence, minimise joint pain and improve cognitive function.

Kirsten Adlard, from The University of Queensland will present the findings of her research that tested the impact of high intensity interval training (HIIT) compared to moderate intensity continuous training in 52 bowel cancer survivors.

“Around 65% of people with cancer survive at least five years after their initial diagnosis. However, 70–100 percent of cancer survivors will experience fatigue that can persist up to ten years beyond treatment,” said Ms Adlard.

Those undertaking HIIT in the study completed four sets of four-minute high intensity exercise bouts, interspersed by three minutes of low intensity exercise.

“We were encouraged to find that bowel cancer survivors were capable of high intensity exercise, with no serious adverse effects. Those who performed HIIT three times a week for eight weeks experienced a significant decrease in their fatigue levels, while those performing moderate intensity exercise experienced consistently high levels of fatigue,” said Ms Adlard.

Professor Janette Vardy from the University of Sydney will also present at the conference, sharing initial findings from a study of 273 colon cancer survivors from Australia and Canada. Her research aims to test how cancer survivors can be encouraged to exercise in order to reduce their cancer risk.

“We found that by offering individualised exercise programs to cancer survivors we can increase their average amount of exercise from 5 to 15 hours a week. This is the level of physical fitness that has previously been found to be associated with a reduced risk of cancer recurrence.

“This initial finding is a crucial first step – it shows that we can actively change cancer survivors’ behaviours through simple exercise programs. The next step is to monitor the patients into the future to see whether their rates of cancer recurrence are actually lower,” said Professor Vardy.

Professor Melinda Irwin, from Yale University, is a renowned expert in the field of physical activity and cancer. She will present a number of sessions at the conference – including one

exploring the benefits of exercise for patients with joint pain associated with hormonal treatments.

“After breast cancer treatment many women are prescribed aromatase inhibitors, which greatly reduce their risk of recurrence. But many women stop taking the treatment due to the side effects, including joint pain. Exercise helps women reduce this pain, which may help them continue to take this vital medication.”

Professor Mei Krishnasamy, President of the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia said the growing body of evidence around the benefits of exercise is increasingly influencing the recommendations given to cancer survivors.

“In recent years research has widened our understanding the benefits of exercise for those undergoing cancer treatment in terms of providing quality of life. Now we are starting to see more research that shows that exercise can also help cancer survivors reduce their ongoing symptoms and improve their odds of longer-term survival.

“Exercise is an important new cancer medicine – and research suggests it should be prescribed to cancer survivors just like any other medicine,” said Professor Krishnasamy.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting Commences today at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, bringing together over 900 cancer researchers, experts and clinicians.

For session times, abstracts or interview opportunities, contact **Hollie Jenkins, 0400 762 010 or hollie.jenkins@cancer.org.au**