



What's Good for the Heart May Also Prevent Cancer **Healthy lifestyles do double duty against 2 major disease groups, study finds**

Seven healthy lifestyle tips recommended by heart experts reduce not only the risk of heart disease but also cancer, a new study finds.

Adopting all seven of the factors from the American Heart Association can reduce the risk of developing cancer by more than 50 percent. Moreover, the benefits are cumulative, with cancer risk declining with each additional recommendation followed, the researchers said.

"These findings aren't surprising, given that many elements, like having a healthy diet, exercising and not smoking, are known to reduce the risk of cancer," said lead researcher Laura Rasmussen-Torvik, an assistant professor in the department of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, in Chicago.

"We thought it was important to demonstrate that adherence to these goals as a whole is significantly associated with a lower risk of cancer," she said.

The healthy habits are as follows:

- Being physically active
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Eating a healthful diet
- Keeping cholesterol under control
- Lowering blood pressure
- Keeping blood sugar in check
- Not smoking

"Health is, inescapably, holistic," said Dr. David Katz, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center. "It would come as little comfort to any of us to hear at the end of a visit to our doctor that the good news was we didn't have heart disease if the bad news was we had cancer. Health means, at least, the absence of all serious disease, and the presence of vitality."

For too long, science has suggested eating one way to avoid heart disease, another to avoid diabetes, and a third to avoid cancer, Katz said.

"This never made sense," he said. "Take good care of your body by exercising it, feeding it well and sparing it exposures to such toxins as tobacco, and it is far more likely to take good care of you, sparing you heart disease and cancer, not to mention other chronic diseases."

The report was published March 18 in the online edition of the journal *Circulation*.

To see the effects of living healthy on the risk for cancer, Rasmussen-Torvik's team collected data on more than 13,000 men and women who took part in an ongoing four-community study of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), which began in 1987.

At the start of the study, all of the participants were asked about their lifestyles and which healthy habits they followed. Twenty years later, almost 3,000 people had developed cancer -- mostly lung, prostate, breast, and colon or rectal cancer.

Those who **followed six or seven of the healthy factors saw a 51 percent lower risk of cancer** than those who didn't follow any, the researchers found.

For those who **followed four factors, there was a 33 percent lower risk for cancer** and for those who followed **one or two, there was a 21 percent lower risk**, the researchers said.

If "not smoking" was removed from the mix of heart-healthy behaviors, the association between heart-healthy factors and lower cancer risk was significantly lessened.

Rasmussen-Torvik said she hopes these findings will help doctors in their efforts to encourage patients to follow the recommendations and also provide extra motivation for their patients.