

# **Breast Cancer and Exercise**

## **A moving patient gathers no cancer**

**By Dr. Robert Avery MD FACP**

“It’s too early, it’s too late, I’m tired, my feet hurt, my whole body hurts, I’m hungry,” these are many of the excuses that keep us from exercising. It is really important that you don’t make excuses but make changes to your life. I’m saying this not because I enjoy working out all the time, which I don’t, but because your risk of breast cancer can be diminished by exercise.

The latest American Cancer Society’s guidelines for physical activity recommend 30 minutes daily of brisk exercise at least 5 days a week. Is there any data to back this up? There sure is. In fact exercise can help prevent both pre and post menopausal breast cancer and if you have had breast cancer, a regular exercise program will improve your survival. Here’s the data.

The first study was recently published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute (2008;100:608). This is a report from the Nurses Health Study II which included 64,777 premenopausal nurses. They were given questionnaires regarding physical activity starting in 1997. After 6 years of follow up, 550 women developed breast cancer. Women whose total activity equaled 3.25 hours per week of running or 13 hours per week of walking had a 23% lower chance of getting breast cancer. This was especially true when the activity occurred in younger women aged 12-22.

A similar article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) in 2003 (2003;290:1331) demonstrated a 20% drop in the risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women who engaged in 10 hours per week of moderate intensity exercise like tennis, jogging or aerobics. This information is taken from the Women’s Health Initiative Observational Study involving more than 74,000 women aged 50-79. Don’t worry if you can’t jog, there were also benefits for those who walk, bike, or swim 5 days a week.

Finally, a study of 1491 women who had received treatment for early stage breast cancer revealed a 44% improvement in survival if they engaged in 30 minutes of walking a day for 6 days every week (J Clin Oncol 2007;25:2345). This survival improvement was enhanced if the women also ate a diet high in fruits and vegetables. The interesting finding is that the benefit was regardless of weight. Your weight is less important than your lifestyle choices of exercise and diet preventing breast cancer recurrence.

So, no more excuses. Get out there and move a little, walk, run, play tennis, or swim. Whatever you do, you can be sure that you will decrease your risk of breast cancer.