# Exercise surpasses drugs in reducing colon cancer death and recurrence risk, landmark trial finds



A groundbreaking international trial has revealed that structured exercise is not only critical for cancer survivors but may also surpass many conventional drugs in efficacy. Conducted over a decade and involving 889 colon cancer patients from countries including the US, UK, Australia, France, Canada, and Israel, the trial's findings suggest that a regular exercise regimen can lead to a staggering 37% reduction in the risk of death and a 28% decrease in the recurrence of cancer. This research was presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting and later published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Historically, patients have been encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle to mitigate cancer risks; however, specific evidence supporting exercise after diagnosis has been scant. The findings from this trial could revolutionise health guidelines, as they establish firm correlations between post-treatment exercise and significant improvements in patient outcomes. Dr Julie Gralow, chief medical officer of ASCO, remarked on the unprecedented nature of the study's conclusions, indicating it may prompt a "major shift" in how oncologists view physical activity during and following treatment.

The structured exercise programme was meticulously designed, providing participants with the assistance of personal trainers. Patients were encouraged to reach specific goals, undertaking activities equivalent to three to four walks of 45 to 60 minutes each week. This meticulous approach not only improved physical health but also enhanced participants' overall well-being. As highlighted by Dr Christopher Booth, the study's lead author, patients commonly ask about ways to improve their outcomes post-treatment; this trial definitively answers that exercise is paramount.

While the study focused exclusively on colon cancer patients, experts believe the findings could resonate across various cancer types. Significant reductions in breast and prostate cancer occurrences were noted among those in the exercise group, suggesting broader applications for the research. Dr Pamela Kunz from Yale School of Medicine emphasised the straightforward nature of exercise as an intervention, calling for its widespread implementation in cancer care protocols.

Furthermore, additional studies have started to explore the implications of physical activity on survival rates for cancer patients. A separate investigation published in the journal Cancer indicated that higher levels of activity could enable colon cancer survivors to achieve survival rates comparable to the general population. This accumulating body of research underscores the crucial role exercise plays in mitigating disparities in long-term survival among cancer patients.

The health benefits of physical activity extend beyond mere survival rates. Engaging in regular exercise can significantly bolster immune functions, reduce inflammation, and improve mental health, which are all vital components of recovery. According to Prof Sir Stephen Powis, national medical director of NHS England, the potential of tailored exercise programmes is "exciting," offering a path that could enhance life expectancy and quality after cancer treatment.

While the evidence advocating the integration of exercise into cancer treatment plans is compelling, experts caution that physical activity may not be suitable for everyone. Patients are encouraged to consult their doctors before initiating any new exercise regimens, ensuring tailored approaches cater to individual health needs.

In conclusion, the implications of this landmark study are profound. As oncologists and healthcare providers prepare to embed exercise interventions into standard care protocols, patients may soon have a powerful new ally in their fight against cancer. Ultimately, adhering to a structured exercise programme could not only improve survival rates but also transform the overall landscape of cancer treatment and recovery.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/01/exercise-better-than-drugs-after-cancer-treatment-international-trial-finds), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/9d77c2927152dfc16b717fa9cc9b9471)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/01/exercise-better-than-drugs-after-cancer-treatment-international-trial-finds), [[3]](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/03/more-evidence-of-power-of-exercise-in-study-of-colon-cancer-survival/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://ascopost.com/news/february-2025/physical-activity-may-help-colorectal-cancer-survivors-live-as-long-as-those-in-general-population/), [[6]](https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/24/health/colon-cancer-exercise-wellness/index.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://newsroom.wiley.com/press-releases/press-release-details/2025/Can-exercise-help-colon-cancer-survivors-live-as-long-as-matched-individuals-in-the-general-population/default.aspx), [[7]](https://www.npr.org/2025/04/07/nx-s1-5323814/exercise-colon-cancer-longevity)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/01/exercise-better-than-drugs-after-cancer-treatment-international-trial-finds), [[6]](https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/24/health/colon-cancer-exercise-wellness/index.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/01/exercise-better-than-drugs-after-cancer-treatment-international-trial-finds> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/9d77c2927152dfc16b717fa9cc9b9471> - An international study involving 889 colon cancer patients across five countries demonstrated that a structured exercise programme significantly improved survival rates and reduced recurrence. Participants who engaged in regular walking had a 28% lower risk of cancer recurrence and a 37% decrease in deaths from any cause after eight years compared to those who received only educational material. The study suggests that exercise coaching should become a standard part of colon cancer care. The findings were presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting and published in the New England Journal of Medicine.
3. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/03/more-evidence-of-power-of-exercise-in-study-of-colon-cancer-survival/> - Research from the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute indicates that regular physical activity after treatment for stage 3 colon cancer can reduce and potentially eliminate survival disparities between cancer patients and the general population. The study suggests that exercise can have a meaningful impact on long-term survival for patients, highlighting the importance of incorporating physical activity into cancer treatment protocols.
4. <https://newsroom.wiley.com/press-releases/press-release-details/2025/Can-exercise-help-colon-cancer-survivors-live-as-long-as-matched-individuals-in-the-general-population/default.aspx> - A study published in the journal Cancer found that higher levels of physical activity may help colon cancer survivors achieve long-term survival rates similar to those of the general population. The research analysed data from two post-treatment trials involving 2,875 patients with stage 3 colon cancer and suggests that exercise can reduce survival disparities between cancer survivors and the general population.
5. <https://ascopost.com/news/february-2025/physical-activity-may-help-colorectal-cancer-survivors-live-as-long-as-those-in-general-population/> - A study published in Cancer indicates that physical activity may help colorectal cancer survivors achieve long-term survival rates comparable to those of individuals in the general population. The research analysed data from two post-treatment trials involving 2,875 patients with stage 3 colorectal cancer and suggests that exercise can reduce early colorectal cancer–related mortality.
6. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/24/health/colon-cancer-exercise-wellness/index.html> - A study published in Cancer found that regular exercise is associated with longer lives for patients with colon cancer. The research suggests that after a diagnosis of colon cancer, engaging in physical activity may help patients live longer, and for some patients, help them live as long, or even longer, as those in the general population without cancer.
7. <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/07/nx-s1-5323814/exercise-colon-cancer-longevity> - Research published in the journal Cancer finds that regular exercise can help colon cancer survivors live longer — in some cases, even longer than people who've never had colon cancer. The study suggests that after a diagnosis of colon cancer, engaging in physical activity may help patients live longer, and for some patients, help them live as long, or even longer, as those in the general population without cancer.