A Powerful Tool for Colon Cancer Survivors: How Exercise Can Improve Your Health

This handout summarizes the results of a major new medical study called the CHALLENGE trial, which looked at the effects of exercise for people who have completed treatment for colon cancer.

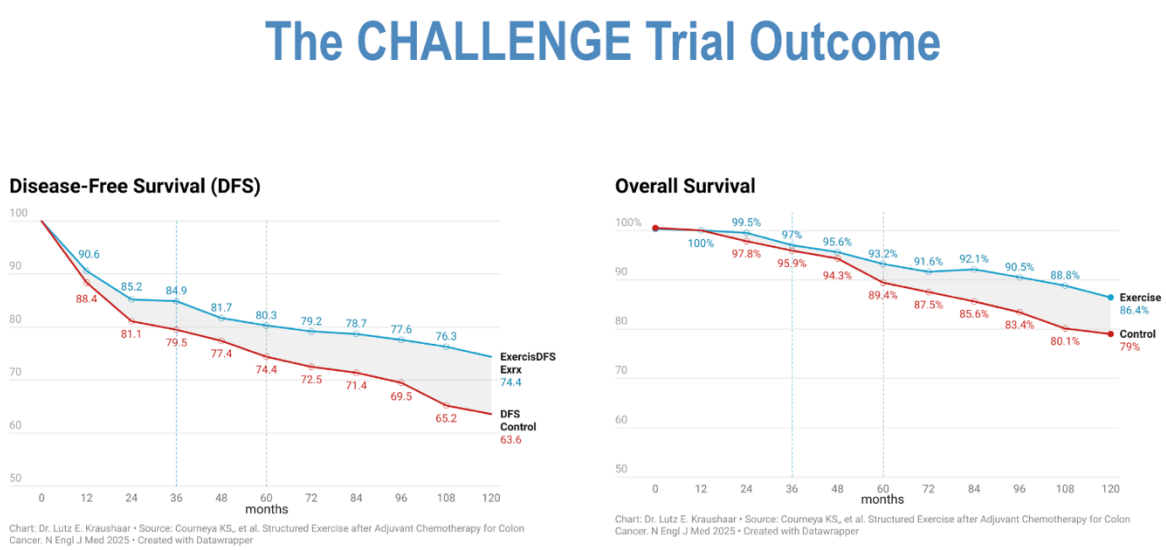
The Bottom Line Up Front

A major new study has shown that a regular, structured exercise program after treatment for colon cancer can **significantly reduce the risk of the cancer coming back** and **help people live longer, healthier lives**.

About the Landmark Study

- **Who Was Studied?** The study included nearly 900 people who had completed treatment (surgery and chemotherapy) for Stage II and III colon cancer. To be in the study, they had to be exercising less than 150 minutes per week beforehand.
- **What Did They Do?** Patients were divided into two groups for three years:
    1. **The Control Group** received health education materials.
    2. **The Exercise Group** received the same materials **PLUS** support and guidance from a certified exercise consultant to help them gradually increase their physical activity.
- **What Was the Exercise Goal?** The main goal for the exercise group was to build up to and maintain at least **150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week** (the equivalent of about 30 minutes of brisk walking, five days a week).

What Did the Study Find? The Exciting Results



Courneya KS,, et al. Structured Exercise after Adjuvant Chemotherapy for Colon Cancer. N Engl J Med 2025

After following the patients for nearly 8 years, the results were clear and powerful:

- **Longer, Healthier Lives:** The group that exercised had a:
  - **28% lower risk** of the cancer returning, developing a new cancer, or death.
  - **37% lower risk** of death from *any* cause.
- **A Clear Picture of Survival:** To put it simply, for every 10 patients in the exercise group, about **9 were still alive** after 8 years, compared to about **8 out of 10** in the group that did not receive the exercise support.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** On top of the survival benefits, the exercisers also reported feeling stronger and having better physical function in their daily lives.
- **It's Not Just About Weight Loss:** Interestingly, these amazing benefits happened even without major changes in body weight, suggesting that exercise helps the body become healthier and better at fighting cancer through other important mechanisms, like improving immune function and reducing inflammation.

What This Means For You: Your Takeaway

This study provides the strongest evidence to date that exercise is a safe and powerful tool you can use to take an active role in your own health and recovery after colon cancer treatment.

- **You are in control.** This isn't about a new drug, but about a positive lifestyle choice with proven benefits.
- **You don't have to be an elite athlete.** The study's goal of 150 minutes of moderate activity per week is achievable. The journey starts with small, consistent steps.
- **The benefits go beyond cancer.** The exercise also improved overall fitness and physical well-being.

Getting Started Safely

It is important to start any new exercise program safely. Please talk with your doctor, physiotherapist, or cancer care team. They can help you create a plan that is right for your individual fitness level, health history, and personal goals.

Based on the CHALLENGE trial, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, June 2025. (This summary is for informational purposes and is not a substitute for professional medical advice.)

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