Diet, Lifestyle and Colorectal Cancer Prevention

Recent studies add to the evidence that colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer through adopting a healthy diet and lifestyle. By following the Recommendations drawn from the WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report, as many as 45% of the colorectal cancer cases could be prevented.

Lifestyle recommendations for preventing colorectal cancer

A recent Danish study [1] showed that following 5 healthy lifestyle guidelines could help prevent colorectal cancer cases by up to 23% in the study population. These guidelines were adapted from a few international recommendations, including the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention in the WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report 2007 [2]. The guidelines used in this study are:

- Being physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- Maintain a waist circumference of no more than 88cm (34.6inch) for women and 102cm (40.1inch) for men
- Limit red meat intake to less than 500g per week, and consume at least 600g of fruits and vegetables a day
- Limit alcohol intake to 14 drinks for men and 7 drinks for women a week
- Not smoking

Findings of this study suggested that following any one of these guidelines could help prevent 13% of colorectal cancer cases; while 23% of the cases could be avoided if people adhered to all of them. The guidelines used in the study were very similar to part of the WCRF/AICR Recommendations for Cancer Prevention [2] except a more lenient limit for waist measurements and a higher suggested vegetables and fruit intake. By following the WCRF/AICR Recommendations, the WCRF/AICR Expert Panel concluded that up to 45% of colorectal cancer cases could be prevented [3] because body fatness is found to be a convincing risk factor for six common cancers [2].

Alcohol – a risk factor for colorectal cancer

Drinking alcohol has been found to be a risk factor for colorectal cancer [2]. The WCRF/AICR Continuous Update Project [4] has updated existing evidence from prospective studies and confirmed the consistent association with alcohol intake and colorectal cancer risk. A significant positive association was observed between alcohol intake and overall colorectal cancer risks in men. A significant relationship was also observed for rectal cancer in women; but a non-significant positive association for colorectal and colon cancer risk was found.

Dietary fibre and colorectal cancer

Food containing dietary fibre was a probable protective factor against colorectal cancer, but the protective role of fruits and vegetables in colorectal cancer has not been confirmed [2].

An updated systematic review and meta-analysis was conducted on fruit and vegetable intakes and colorectal cancer incidence [4]. The findings showed a weak inverse association between vegetable intake and colorectal cancer risk. When looking at fruits and vegetables combined, or fruit alone, the inverse associations seem to be limited to colon cancer only, and appeared to be very weak. Further studies are needed to confirm a dose-response relationship between fruit and vegetable intake and colorectal cancer risk.

Another Danish study [5] showed that higher wholegrain intake was associated with a lower risk of colon cancer in men. After following up for a median of 10.6 years, 244 out of 26,630 men were diagnosed with either colon or rectal cancers. A higher intake of wholegrain products was associated with a significant 15% lower incidence observed in men and a borderline significant 10% lower risk in rectal cancer. No consistent associations were observed for either colon or rectal cancer in women.

The updated systematic review of colorectal cancer of the WCRF/AICR Continuous Update Project has been completed. In the New Year, WCRF HK will bring you the “Continuous Update Report on Colorectal Cancer” for the most up-to-date review of existing evidence on the disease. Please visit www.dietandcancerreport.org/cu and stay tuned.

References:

WCRF HK’s New Cancer Prevention Publication

Our “Reducing Your Risk of Stomach Cancer” leaflet is now available. It offers practical tips and advice on how to reduce your risk of stomach cancer. WCRF HK also provides information on how to reduce your risk of other cancers. To view the leaflets online, please visit www.wcrf-hk.org or contact us on (852) 2529 5025 to request your copy.
Adherence to the health behaviours as recommended by the WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report [1] was found to be protective against recurrence of breast cancer in postmenopausal women [2]. This recent study followed 1,228 breast cancer survivors, one year after diagnosis, for 4.4 years. Their lifestyle habits were analysed and one point was allocated to individuals if each of the WCRF/AICR Recommendation was followed, excluding breastfeeding but with the inclusion of smoking history.

During the follow-up period, 122 women were diagnosed with breast cancer recurrence. An overall poor compliance to the recommendations was observed. The median score was 4. The lowest compliance was the recommendation on physical activity, followed by the avoidance of processed meat. No association was observed between higher score and recurrence in the study. However, postmenopausal women who adhered to 6 or more recommendations were significantly less likely to recur (HR 0.28, p=0.005) compared to those who adhered to 3 recommendations or less.

A more thorough and comprehensive review of the evidence on breast cancer survivors is under way within the WCRF/AICR Continuous Update Project (expecting relevant updates in 2011). Until then, it is best to advise breast cancer survivors to follow the WCRF/AICR Recommendations for Cancer Prevention [1] to lower the risk of recurrence.

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The more a woman sits, regardless of activity level, the greater her risk of endometrial cancer. A recent study [1] adds to the growing research on the health risks of sedentary behaviours. It confirmed the findings of the WCRF/AICR’s Second Expert Report [2] that being physically active lowers the risk of endometrial cancer.

Researchers analysed all relevant population studies published through 2009, separating activity by recreational and occupational. For both categories of activity, women who were most active had almost a 30% lower risk of endometrial cancer, comparing with the least active women.

When analysing sedentary behaviours, the authors found that women who were both inactive and who sat for 9 or more hours per day had twice the risk of endometrial cancer as active women who sat less than 3 hours per day. Independent of activity level and after adjusting for obesity, the finding suggested that women who sat for over 9 hours a day had a higher risk of endometrial cancer compared to those who sat fewer than 3 hours.

References:

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Check List
Please circulate this newsletter to other colleagues to help us spread the good news that cancer is largely preventable.

**Informed** is available free of charge to all healthcare professionals.

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**Newsletter copy review**
WCRF International Executives, WCRF UK Education Department, WCRF HK Copy Review Team.
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**WCRF/AICR Recommendations & Breast Cancer Recurrence**

**Role of physical activity in preventing endometrial cancer**

**WCRF HK Health Professional Conference 2011**

**Mark Your Diary**
WCRF HK is pleased to inform you that the WCRF HK Health Professional Conference 2011 will take place on Saturday, 28th May 2011. Prominent speakers will share their expertise and experience in Cancer Prevention from the Chinese and Western Perspectives. Please mark your diary and stay tuned for more details.

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