

# Heart disease exercise programme could work for bowel cancer patients

28 September 2016

Could rehabilitation programmes for heart disease patients be used to help people recovering from bowel cancer get back on their feet? That's the question cancer care experts at the University of Stirling have been exploring.

Researchers have found health and exercise sessions currently provided to individuals recovering from [heart disease](#) could also help people who have undergone [bowel cancer](#) surgery.

The NHS already uses physical activity to help thousands of people with heart problems improve their chances of survival and quality of life, and Stirling scientists now believe it could be rolled out to help people with an entirely different illness.

Dr Gill Hubbard, Reader in Cancer Care in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, said: "People recovering from bowel cancer surgery are not currently meeting the recommended levels of [physical activity](#) after they undergo surgery. This could be for a number of reasons, but often patients do not know if they are safe to exercise.

"We wanted to bring together people recovering from heart disease and bowel cancer to see if the same rehabilitation programme could work for both groups. We referred patients with bowel cancer to the cardiac rehabilitation classes and found cardiac patients welcomed those with cancer into their classes. Both groups enjoyed exercising together and supported each other to make a full recovery."

The rehabilitation programme involves aerobic and body strengthening exercises for about an hour each week for 12 weeks. Evidence clearly shows that these exercises are good for people with heart disease and cancer, and although cardiac rehabilitation exists for people recovering from a heart attack, there is currently no equivalent rehabilitation programme for patients with cancer.

The study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), asked patients to record their physical fitness, quality of life, anxiety, depression and figure before and after the 12-week programme and gathered the views of doctors involved in [cardiac rehabilitation](#).

Dr Hubbard continued: "We found cardiac clinicians were happy to involve cancer patients in their programmes, but to make this work on a much larger scale additional training would be required to fully support cancer survivors. Although a novel idea, we believe marrying these two quite separate groups during the rehabilitation process could vastly improve the quality of life for lots of [people](#) who are recovering from bowel cancer but do not have the confidence to exercise."

**More information:** Gill Hubbard et al. The use of cardiac rehabilitation services to aid the recovery of patients with bowel cancer: a pilot randomised controlled trial with embedded feasibility study, *Health Services and Delivery Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04240](https://doi.org/10.3310/hsdr04240)

Provided by University of Stirling

APA citation: Heart disease exercise programme could work for bowel cancer patients (2016, September 28) retrieved 12 September 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-09-heart-disease-programme-bowel-cancer.html>

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