

Better postoperative recovery for physically active people

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People who are physically active on a regular basis recover better after surgery for colorectal cancer. However, starting to exercise only after the diagnosis is a fact had no effect on recovery, a University of Gothenburg thesis shows.

In working on his thesis, Aron Onerup, who obtained his doctorate in surgery at the University's Sahlgrenska Academy and is now a specialist doctor at Sahlgrenska University Hospital, carried out an [observational study](#) of 115 patients diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

The participants who had been physically inactive proved, three weeks after their surgery, to be at higher risk of not feeling that they had recovered physically. Among them, the risk of postoperative complications was also more than four times higher than it was for participants who had been physically active.

Studies with similar results were conducted for individuals scheduled for operations to treat breast cancer and biliary tract disease as well.

Quick exercise input ineffective

The question was whether the odds of recovery could be improved for patients diagnosed with colorectal cancer. In another study, 761 individuals were randomly assigned to either receive ordinary, routine care or follow an [exercise program](#), on their own, for about two weeks before and four weeks after surgery for colorectal [cancer](#).

However, this program—which included half an hour of moderate-intensity exercise daily—had no effect on the latter group's self-reported physical recovery, nor on their complication risk, repeat [surgery](#), readmission to hospital, or length of hospital stay.

"Although the [exercise](#) study didn't show any effects in the brief postoperative period, it's possible that measures resulting in increased physical activity in the long term may have positive health effects. The key is not to introduce measures into health care until they've been scientifically evaluated," Onerup states.

Many reasons for exercise

However, the overall picture provides evidence that, at the point when it becomes clear that an operation for biliary tract disease or [colorectal cancer](#) is necessary, people's [physical activity](#) level is clearly connected with the subsequent course of their recovery.

"The research findings indicate that there are further reasons to work for a population that's as physically active as possible, besides the gains in terms of, for example, cardiovascular and mental health that are already known," Onerup says.

More information: The role of physical activity for recovery after surgical procedures. hdl.handle.net/2077/67125

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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