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(Neb.)-Small Study Shows Exercise May Ward Off Cancer Reoccurrence



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 10/31/2012 09:05 AM

(UNMC)-Three University of Nebraska Medical Center scientists are among the authors of a preliminary pilot study which suggests exercise by cancer survivors may buck up their immune systems and help ward off recurrences of the disease. Laura Bilek, Ph.D., associate professor of physical therapy education; Graham Sharp, Ph.D., professor of genetics, cell biology and anatomy; and Geoffrey Thiele, Ph.D., professor of internal medicine rheumatology, along with a trio from Rocky Mountain Cancer Rehabilitation Institute, analyzed T cells in the blood of cancer survivors before and after a 12-week exercise program. They presented "Effect of Exercise on T Cells in Cancer Survivors" last week at the Integrative Biology of Exercise VI meeting in Westminster, Colo.

The idea that exercise can change the immune system for the better is not new. But research by the UNMC-RMCRI team specifically targeted the T cells of cancer survivors. T cells typically fight infections and suppress cancers. But previous research has shown that following chemotherapy, many T cells become senescent, or less effective. The UNMC-RMCRI team's initial research suggested that exercise may decrease senescent T cells, making room for functional T cell populations, those ready to fight infections and potentially kill surviving tumor cells.

"What we're suggesting is that with exercise, you might be getting rid of T cells that aren't helpful and make room for T cells that might be helpful," Dr. Bilek said. Data analysis is still in progress and a great deal of further research is needed, Dr. Bilek said. The pilot study will be instrumental in helping the investigators design larger clinical trials to study this question more thoroughly.

--University of Nebraska Medical Center