



Mini Review

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Beyond Aesthetics: The Hidden Dangers of Weight Loss in the Context of Cancer Risk

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Cancer is an ailment marked by the uncontrolled proliferation of cells that have transformed, influenced by forces of natural selection [1]. In 2020, the United States recorded a total of 1,603,844 newly diagnosed cases of cancer, with 602,347 individuals succumbing to the disease [2]. Indeed, a prolonged and dedicated research effort spanning decades has been undertaken to recognize the risk factors associated with cancer. Various genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors contribute to cancer development.

Recent Findings

A recently published research study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) aimed to assess the occurrence of subsequent cancer diagnoses 12 months among health professionals who had experienced weight loss during the previous 2 years compared with those without recent weight loss [3]. The study emphasized that individuals who underwent significant weight loss, surpassing 10% of their body weight in the last two years, were notably more prone to cancer diagnosis.

Over the 12 months following the recorded changes in weight, individuals who underwent a weight loss exceeding 10% of their body weight showed a significantly elevated cancer incidence rate of 1362/100,00 cases per 100,000 person-years. This was notably higher than those who did not experience weight loss, where the cancer incidence rate was 869 cases per 100,000 person-years. Upper gastrointestinal tract cancer was especially prevalent in participants who had undergone recent weight loss.

The study data that linked recent weight loss to a higher risk of cancer challenges the conventional notion that weight loss consistently leads to better overall health. Traditionally, weight loss has been applauded for its positive impact on reducing health risks associated with obesity, such as cardiovascular issues, diabetes, and specific cancer types. Obese adults who deliberately lose weight may experience a reduction of 15% in mortality from all causes [4]. Weight loss yields numerous health benefits,

including lowered blood pressure and cholesterol, reducing risks of chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. It boosts energy, improves sleep quality, and enhances mobility, while also bolstering self-esteem and mental well-being, ultimately enabling individuals to lead more fulfilling lives [5].

The primary factors contributing to cancer mortality worldwide stem from behavioral and environmental influences such as dietary habits and sedentary lifestyles, substance abuse, sexual and reproductive health practices, exposure to air pollution, and the use of contaminated needles [6]. Recent findings suggest a nuanced relationship between weight loss and cancer risk, indicating that significant or rapid weight loss may potentially increase the risk of certain cancers. However, it's important to distinguish between intentional weight loss efforts for health reasons and unintentional weight loss, which could be indicative of underlying health issues. While obesity remains a well-established risk factor for various cancers, further research is needed to fully understand the implications of weight loss on cancer risk and to develop targeted interventions for cancer prevention and management.

Conclusion

Additional investigation is necessary to delve into the underlying mechanisms that tie weight loss to an increased risk of cancer. While the study establishes a connection between significant weight loss and a higher incidence of cancer, gaining clarity on the biological pathways or factors that contribute to this link could offer valuable insights for devising preventive strategies and targeted interventions. The occurrence of upper gastrointestinal tract cancer has risen significantly for those who have recently undergone weight loss. Investigating the precise correlation with this type of cancer could offer valuable insights for future research and intervention. A collaborative, multidisciplinary approach among health care professionals, including dietitians, psychologists, and oncologists, is crucial for navigating the intricate link between weight loss and cancer risk.

Healthcare professionals should be vigilant in monitoring weight fluctuations in both patients and colleagues. Early identification and prompt action could be pivotal in minimizing the risks linked to weight loss and preventing the development or advancement of cancer.

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