

Gardening Has Several Benefits for Cancer Survivors

Those who do home vegetable gardening are more likely to increase their physical activity and eat more fruits and vegetables.

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Growing your own vegetables and fruits has long been associated with many benefits. But, now, new findings published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* reveal a new one: Cancer survivors who partake in home vegetable gardening are more likely to experience an increase in physical activity and fruit and vegetable intake, reports [Reuters](#).

For the pilot study, researchers gathered 42 cancer survivors, age 60 or older. All participants were Alabama residents who had been diagnosed with early and mid-stage localized cancers with high survival rates, such as bladder, breast, prostate and thyroid cancers.

Half of the study's participants were randomly assigned to a yearlong gardening program, where master gardeners helped them establish three seasonal vegetable gardens in their homes. The other half was put on a waiting list for the program.

Researchers examined participants' diets, conducted strength and balance tests and provided blood tests to assess stress and general health before and after the study. Participants were also asked a series of questions to measure stress levels, quality of life and mental state.

According to study outcomes, investigators learned that gardeners were more likely to eat one more fruit or vegetable serving per day than their counterparts and gained less weight around their waists (2.3 centimeters versus 8 centimeters). What's more, some of these folks showed lower levels of stress. Gardeners also had a greater sense of worth, while those on the waiting list group experienced a decline in this area.

"We can send people to the gym, but that isn't meaningful, and we can counsel them to eat better, but we want it to be more rewarding, and we want it to be long-term," said Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, PhD, lead author and chair of nutrition sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Comprehensive Cancer Center. "With gardening, we've hit the ball out of the ballpark."

Because the study size was relatively small, it was hard to measure physical activity

improvements, according to an expert not involved in the study.

Nevertheless, these results are promising. As Demark-Wahnefreid says, individuals are building back up their physical functioning, which is having a positive effect on their quality of life.

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