



Dairy and low-fat diet can reduce risk of bowel cancer - study

Eating dairy and a low-fat diet can reduce the risk of bowel cancer in New Zealand, a new University of Otago study reveals.

The four-year study - the first to specifically examine the role of diet as a cause of bowel cancer in New Zealand – also concluded that “higher than average” consumption of lamb, pork and bread and processed meat such as salami and sausages, was also associated with an increased risk. An “average” consumption is about three servings a week.

The study was undertaken by Dr Mary Jane Sneyd and Associate Professor Brian Cox of the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine at the Otago Medical School, Dunedin, with funding secured by Bowel Cancer New Zealand.

Associate Professor Cox, says while an increased risk from the consumption of processed meat has also been found overseas, this study is the first to suggest that the increased risk may not occur in people who generally choose low-fat foods.

A reduced risk of bowel cancer was also found with a history of vigorous exercise.

"There are several risk factors for bowel cancer and their relative contribution to the disease differs among countries and between regions within countries. Therefore, the prevention of bowel cancer here requires New Zealand specific knowledge of the relative contribution of the risk factors for bowel cancer, which is vital for the control of bowel cancer in New Zealand.

"This study, and further analyses of the data, can provide the necessary information for bowel cancer control," he says.

Contrary to previous research, this study found greater than average consumption of fresh fruit or vegetables did not significantly reduce the risk of bowel cancer and no reduced risk was found for vegetarians or vegans.

Professor Cox says "Because of our very high incidence of bowel cancer internationally, a targeted bowel cancer prevention programme is necessary for control of the disease. Bowel Cancer New Zealand is one of the few New Zealand organisations that provides information about the prevention of bowel cancer."

Bowel Cancer New Zealand general manager Rebekah Heal says the charity was proud to secure substantial funding for "this important piece of research, which will help improve bowel cancer health promotion and prevention activities".

"There is no doubt of the importance of bowel cancer research with New Zealand's high incidence of bowel cancer. Bowel Cancer NZ is proud of our involvement in funding this study and taking New Zealand one step closer to a future with fewer deaths from this disease."

[Bowel Cancer NZ](#) encourages open discussion about bowel cancer with medical professionals and avoiding 'sitting on your symptoms'. Symptoms include:

- Bleeding from the bottom or seeing blood in the toilet after a bowel motion;
- Change of bowel motions over several weeks without returning to normal;
- Persistent or periodic severe pain in the abdomen;
- A lump or mass in the abdomen;
- Tiredness and loss of weight for no particular reason;
- Anaemia.

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