The Link Between Diabetes and Colon Cancer

By Cindy Beck, ND and Patient Navigator for the SPIPA Colon Health Program

If you have diabetes, you have approximately 30% higher risk of developing colorectal cancer.¹ Health professionals are starting to understand why.

Sitting behind a desk, in the car, or on the couch most of the time is hard on our bodies. We were not made to stay in one spot for a long time. We are meant to move, stretch, run and climb—use our bodies—just as our ancestors did. Our bodies start to slow down when we sit too long, causing problems.

Diabetes and Colon Cancer

One of the many things that exercise does is move blood to working muscles. This is good for diabetes because muscles use the sugar in the blood (glucose) for energy during exercise. And later, even when resting, muscles are able to absorb sugar better. Exercising keeps blood sugar levels low and safe throughout the day. Keeping blood sugar levels in a normal range helps to prevent diabetes from developing or progressing.

This makes sense for lowering the risk of diabetes, but how does exercise help prevent colon cancer?

Health professionals call the link between exercise, diabetes and colon cancer Syndrome X, or Metabolic Syndrome. Syndrome X's primary features are abdominal obesity (belly fat), high blood pressure, and high blood sugar levels. Studies show that there is a link between high blood sugar levels and obesity. As it turns out, the factors for developing diabetes are the same factors for developing colon cancer (too much belly fat, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar levels).²

Exercise helps to burn calories. When you use fuel (glucose) to keep muscles active, you keep blood sugar levels lower overall, and you shrink belly fat. All this leads to less risk for colon cancer.

How to Stay F.I.T.T.

F for Frequency = How often you exercise. Being active daily is nice, but start with 3 days a week and move up to 5 days a week as a goal.

I for Intensity = How hard and fast you exercise. Go slow, at first, and the speed will come.

T for Time = How long you exercise. Exercising 30 minutes each time is best, but if you go for 10 minutes at first, then that's a good starting point. Make 30 minutes a goal.

T for Type of exercise = Aerobic exercise, like walking and bicycling, is the best overall type of exercise because it helps you lose weight and keeps blood sugar levels stable. Training for strength like weight lifting and flexibility like yoga stretching are also important for a balanced body.


**TV-Break Chair Exercises:** Cindy Beck, Pilates instructor at Squaxin Island (and Skokomish) Tribe says, “Simply rise, stand, and return to a sitting position several times. Go slowly at first, and use support if you need it. As you gain balance, try it without support. Slowly standing and sitting is good for the thigh, belly, and back muscles.”