Weight During Adolescence May Affect Pancreatic Cancer Risk in Adulthood

New research has linked adolescent obesity with up to a four-fold increased risk of pancreatic cancer later in life. The study’s results also suggest that overweight and even higher weight within the “normal” weight range in men may increase pancreatic cancer risk in a graded manner. The findings are published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society.

Pancreatic cancer is the sixth most common cause of cancer-related deaths in the world, and studies have linked adult obesity with an increased risk for its occurrence. To uncover any potential associations with adolescent weight, Zohar Levi, MD, of Rabin Medical Center and Tel Aviv University, and his colleagues analyzed 1,087,358 Israeli Jewish men and 707,212 Jewish women who underwent a compulsory physical examination between the ages of 16 and 19 years from 1967 to 2002. Pancreatic cancer incidence through 2012 was identified by linkage to the Israeli National Cancer Registry.

Over a median of 23.3 years of follow up, 551 new cases of pancreatic cancer cases were identified, including 423 cancers among men and 128 cancers among women. Compared with normal weight (5th to <85th percentile), obesity (≥95th percentile) was associated with a 3.67-times higher cancer risk among men and a 4.07-times higher risk among women.

Among men, high-normal BMI (≥75th to <85th percentile) and overweight (85th to <95th percentile) were associated with 49 percent and 97 percent higher risks for cancer, respectively, compared with low-normal BMI (≥5th to <25th percentile).

“The overall population attributable fraction of pancreatic cancer due to adolescent overweight and obesity was 11 percent among this Israeli Jewish population,” said Dr. Levi.

An accompanying editorial by Chanan Meydan, MD, of the Mayanei Hayeshua Medical Center in Israel, highlights systemic inflammation caused by obesity as a potential driver behind the development of pancreatic cancer.

November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

Additional information

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