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Cancer survivors die of non-cancer-related causes at much higher rates than the general public, and evidence suggests poor nutrition is to blame.

“With more than 12 million American cancer survivors — about 4 percent of the population — it is time to concentrate on guidelines to help patients avoid other complications that lead to death,” said Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, Ph.D., R.D., professor and Webb Endowed Chair of Nutrition Sciences in the Department of Nutrition Sciences in the UAB School of Health Professions .

Data support the hypothesis that better nutrition is likely to improve cancer outcomes and also help prevent and manage chronic health conditions that follow cancer treatment, such as heart complications, diabetes and other endocrine disorders, bone loss and functional impairment, said Demark-Wahnefried, who also is associate director for Cancer Prevention and Control in the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center. She and colleagues at the University of Minnesota and the University of California, San Diego , examined the evidence supporting nutrition recommendations for cancer survivors in a commentary published in the March 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* .

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight tops the list of priorities for cancer survivors. Also

highly recommended:

--At least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day;

--A diet rich in vegetables, fruits and whole grains; and

--Limited consumption of red and processed meats and alcohol.

The authors emphasize that cancer survivors should try and obtain their nutrients from foods rather than supplements, which have been linked with higher cancer-specific and all-cause mortality among cancer survivors.

Knowledge gaps that call for further research also were identified. Most cancer patients have one or more other medical issues or conditions that complicate their overall health, and better nutritional management of co-morbidities may improve their quality of life. The nutritional demands of specific cancers also should be investigated.

The increased number of cancer survivors presents greater opportunities to conduct longer-term research, says lead author Kim Robien, Ph.D., R.D., assistant professor in the Division of Epidemiology and Community Health at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

A nationwide clinical trial to assess the benefits of weight-loss among breast-cancer survivors is under way and recruiting overweight and obese women diagnosed with Stage I-III breast cancer within the past five years at sites in Birmingham, San Diego, St. Louis and Denver.

However, the authors note, nutritional intervention requires the cooperation of the individual patient, and evidence suggests that few cancer survivors follow diet and lifestyle recommendations for cancer prevention, despite encouragement by the American Cancer Society and the World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research.

Demark-Wahnefried and Robien collaborated with Cheryl Rock, Ph.D., R.D., professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of California, San Diego.

An audio podcast featuring a group discussion among the authors and information specifically for journalists are located at http://adajournal.org/content/mediapodcast . Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media; contact Nancy Burns, Elsevier Publishing, at 314-447-8013 or adajmedia@elsevier.com to obtain permission.