

Being Active when You Have Cancer



Do you want to feel better, sleep better and move better? Being active during and after a cancer diagnosis is an important way to reduce fatigue, increase strength and help ease depression. Regular physical activity, including aerobic activity and strength training, can help you get through your treatments and decrease treatment side effects. In addition, stretching can help restore flexibility in joints that have lost range of motion due to surgery or radiation.

Research supports the following benefits of physical activity for cancer survivors. Being active:

- Helps reduce fatigue, the most common side effect of cancer treatment
- Improves symptoms of depression and anxiety and helps you sleep better
- Helps maintain or improve physical function (your ability to get things done in your life)
- Improves your immune system, appetite, muscle strength, range of motion and simply helps your body and brain work better
- Does not increase your risk of breast cancer-related lymphedema and may help with these symptoms;
- Decreases your risk of cancer coming back.



Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Avoid inactivity! If you get moving as soon as you are diagnosed, you'll feel better. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Do laps around the dining room table. Find opportunities to move throughout your day.

Talk with Your Doctor

Talk to your health care provider before you start a new exercise program. Are there any activity limitations due to medications, surgeries or treatment?

Expert Support

Ask if your hospital or local wellness center has a structured cancer exercise program. ACSM Certified Cancer Exercise Trainers (CETs), some physical therapists or members of the health care team can help you design your activity plan.

Build a Plan

Keep a daily log of your exercise, fatigue (0-10 scale), medications and treatments. This will help you learn what works best. Find an activity buddy from home, work or a cancer support group to stay motivated

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like walking, light cycling, yoga, tai chi or water exercise), 75 minutes/week of vigorous activity (like brisk walking, singles tennis or hiking hills) or a combination of both. You'll improve the way your body stores and uses energy, as well as your stamina and heart health.

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity!

How often?

3-5 days/week

How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard

How much?

Start w/ a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 total minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. During treatment, several short sessions may work better than one long one. Be active however you can.

Aerobic Activity Tips and Cautions

Some cancer medications (chemo, etc.) and treatments (surgery and radiation) cause side effects. Check with your health care provider for specific precautions. For example:

- If you have peripheral neuropathy, take care in walking on treadmills – use handrails. • If you're at increased risk of infection or irritated skin, avoid swimming pools.
- Avoid exercise if you have an active infection (fever); just after surgery, have extreme fatigue or difficulty walking
- Some treatments are associated with damage to your heart. Ask your doctor if you've received any heart-damaging treatment. Get a heart health check prior to starting exercise.

Strength Training

Strength training is important for people with cancer because it builds muscle. Muscle tissue plays a big role in balance, fatigue and quality of life. Muscle may also be important to processing chemotherapy drugs. You don't have to be a bodybuilder! Plus, strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups or chair squats).

How often?

2-3 days/week
*Rest day in between!

How hard?

Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.

How much?

6-15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Increase weight when you can do 15 reps.

Remember: If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly. If you have lymphedema, you may benefit from wearing a compression sleeve during strength training.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with cancer. But you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

Flexibility

Gently stretch your muscles 2-3 days/ week (or daily) to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds. Stretch specific areas recommended by your health care provider.

Take More Steps

Simply take more steps! Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Slowly build up to 7,000-9,000 steps/day.

Just for Fun

Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Dance to your favorite song. Try yoga or tai chi. Play with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.

Balance

Exercises may include standing on one foot, walking on a line or using a balance board. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support if needed.

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort. If you experience extreme fatigue (typically 2-3 days after chemo), still do light activity. Just cut back exercise time on those days.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow! ° Warm up and cool down at an easy pace before and after exercise.

More Help

To learn more about being active with cancer, check out these resources:

American Cancer Society:

www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html

National Comprehensive Cancer Network:

www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life_with_cancer/exercise.aspx

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____
