

Exercise for the Cancer Survivor

This patient handout will provide information on the benefits of exercise for cancer survivors and detailed instructions on how to safely incorporate exercise into their routine. The recommendations are based on guidelines from the American College of Sports Medicine, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, and the American Cancer Society, among others.

Physical activity has been associated with both decreased cancer risk and cancer mortality. There is strong evidence that higher levels of physical activity are associated with a lower risk of cancers of the bladder, breast, colon, endometrium, esophagus, kidney and stomach with a reduction in the risk of 10% to 20%.

There is growing evidence that sedentary behavior, time spent engaged in activities such as TV-watching and computer use, may be an independent risk factor for poor prognosis in cancer survivors as well as for cancer risk in the general population.

Regular exercise is highly beneficial for cancer survivors. Here are some key points and guidelines to help you get started with an exercise program:

Benefits of Exercise:

- **Reduces Fatigue:** Exercise can significantly decrease cancer-related fatigue, which is a common issue for many survivors.
- **Improves Mood and Quality of Life:** Regular physical activity can help alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, improving overall well-being.
- **Enhances Physical Function:** Many cancer survivors report feeling 10 years older after a year of cancer treatment. Exercise helps maintain and improve strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular health, making daily activities easier and preventing this decline.
- **Potential Survival Benefits:** Engaging in regular physical activity may reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and improve survival rates.
- **Improve overall health:** Reduce risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, etc. May also control your blood pressure.
- **Better Sleep**

Exercise Guidelines:

- **Aerobic Exercise:** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise per week. This can be broken down into 30-minute sessions, five times a week.
- **Light activity** is movement that doesn't cause any change in breathing.
- **Household activities:** Child care, Light housework such as dusting

- **Fitness activities:** Restorative yoga, Tai chi, Walking slowly
- **Sports and games:** Activity-promoting video game, bowling, biking at 5 miles per hour or slower, Playing catch
- **Moderate activity** is movement during which you can talk but can't sing.
- **Household activities:** General gardening, Using a manual wheelchair
- **Fitness activities:** Moderate intensity yoga such as Vinyasa, Pilates, Water aerobics, Walking briskly
- **Sports and games:** Ballroom or line dancing, Baseball, softball, volleyball, Biking on level ground or with few hills, Doubles tennis, Pickleball
- **Vigorous activity** is movement that makes it hard to talk because you're breathing hard.
- **Household activities:** Heavy gardening
- **Fitness activities:** High-intensity yoga, hiking uphill, Jogging, running, jumping rope, Martial arts, Stair climbing, Walking (race paced)
- **Sports and games:** Aerobic and fast dancing, biking faster than 10 miles per hour, Boxing, Running sports (basketball, hockey, soccer), Singles tennis, Swimming (fast pace or laps)
- **Strength Training:** Include strength training exercises at least two days per week. Use weights, resistance bands, or body-weight exercises to perform 2 sets of 8-15 repetitions for each major muscle group
 - Use light weight the first week, then gradually add more.
 - Use proper form for safety
 - To prevent injury, don't jerk or thrust weights into position but use smooth, steady movements. Avoid locking your arm and leg joints in a tightly straightened position.
 - For resistance bands, choose a light band to start and move on to a stronger band when you can do 2 sets of 10-15 repetitions easily. Do the exercises in a slow, controlled manner and don't let the band snap back.
- **Flexibility and Balance:** Incorporate stretching and balance exercises to improve flexibility and reduce the risk of falls, especially if you have neuropathy or other balance issues.
 - Tai chi and yoga are good for "moving meditation"
 - Try standing on one foot and then the other – hold on to a chair to steady yourself to start.
 - Try heel to toe walking.

Getting Started:

- **Consult Your Doctor:** Before starting any exercise program, discuss it with your healthcare provider to ensure it is safe for you, especially if you have specific health concerns or conditions.
- **Start Slowly:** Begin with low-intensity activities and gradually increase the duration and intensity as your fitness improves.
- **Stay Consistent and make it a priority:** Regularity is key. Find activities you enjoy to help you stay motivated and make exercise a part of your daily routine.
- **Make it social:** Find an "exercise buddy." Join a class or set regular meetups.
- **Make it fun:** Do activities you enjoy to make exercise more fun. If you love the outdoors, try biking or hiking or try listening to music while you walk, garden or clean.
- **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to how your body responds to exercise. If you experience pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath, stop and consult your healthcare provider.

Special Considerations:

- **Bone Health:** If you have osteoporosis, avoid high-impact activities and movements that place excessive load on fragile bones or that have a risk of falling.

- **Lymphedema:** If you have lymphedema, consider wearing a compression garment during exercise and avoid activities that may exacerbate the condition.
 - Full use of your limbs and range of motion exercises can maintain strength and flexibility. Exercise your arms and shoulders when possible.
 - Increase your strength with resistance training in small steps. Compression garments may be needed during resistance training.
- **Peripheral Neuropathy:** If you have neuropathy, focus on exercises that improve balance and stability, such as stationary biking or water exercises.
 - Wear protective footwear or water shoes to prevent skin breakdown
 - Use weights with a soft covering or padded gloves
 - If you're concerned about dropping weights, consider using weight machines or resistance bands

Remember, exercise is a powerful tool in your recovery and long-term health. By incorporating regular physical activity into your routine, you can improve your quality of life and overall well-being.

Resources:

[Walk. Run. Dance. Play. What's your move? - Move Your Way | odphp.health.gov](http://odphp.health.gov)

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA <http://www.livestrong.org/YMCA>

SilverSneakers: <https://www.silversneakers.com>