



## Cancer and Exercise: Do they fit together?

Everyone knows someone affected by cancer, whether it is a friend, loved-one, someone they are caring for, or themselves. Lives are changed in an instant. It's often a scary time. The scariest part can be all the changes to one's body, including the possibility of physical features changing or the possibility of losing function of a body part or the body as a whole. The unknown is often frightening. Guidance and collaboration between medical professionals can help reduce that fear.

### Should I exercise during cancer treatment and recovery?

Research strongly suggests that exercise is not only safe during cancer treatment, but it can also improve physical functioning and many aspects of quality of life. Moderate exercise has been shown to improve fatigue (extreme tiredness), anxiety, and self-esteem. It also helps heart and blood vessel fitness, muscle strength, and body composition (how much of your body is made up of fat, bone, or muscle).

People getting chemotherapy and radiation who already exercise may need to do so at a lower intensity and build up more slowly than people who are not getting cancer treatment. The main goal should be to stay as active as possible and slowly increase your level of activity over time after treatment.



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will be diagnosed with cancer.



## Are there special precautions survivors should consider?

Certain issues for cancer survivors may prevent or affect their ability to exercise. Some effects of treatment may increase the risk for exercise-related problems. For instance:

- People with severe anemia (low red blood cell counts) should delay activity until the anemia is better.
- Those with weak immune systems should avoid public gyms and other public places until their white blood cell counts return to safe levels.
- People getting radiation should avoid swimming pools because chlorine may irritate the skin at the treatment area.

If you were not active before diagnosis, you should start with low-intensity activities and then slowly increase your activity level. Certain people should use extra caution to reduce their risk of falls and injuries:

- Older people
- Those with bone disease (cancer in the bones or thinning bones, such as osteoporosis)
- People with arthritis
- Anyone with nerve damage (peripheral neuropathy)



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## Can regular exercise reduce the risk of cancer coming back?

This has not been looked at for all types of cancer, but there have been studies of survivors of breast, colorectal, prostate, and ovarian cancers. In these studies, people with higher levels of physical activity after diagnosis lived longer and had less chance of the cancer coming back. Still, more studies are needed to see if exercise has a direct effect on cancer growth.

In the meantime, since physical activity is known to prevent heart and blood vessel disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis, cancer survivors should try to have a physically active lifestyle.

## Is there guidance available?

Morris County Hospital Rehab offers a physical therapist certified as a Cancer Exercise Specialist to help decrease the fear that may come along with getting started moving again for cancer patients diagnosed, currently undergoing treatments, and/or recently defeated cancer. Physical therapists can help people regain their limited activity tolerance, decreased range of motion and decreased strength, as well as help improve pain, lymphedema, postural limitations, and more following surgical procedures, chemotherapy and/or radiation. Contact your physician and/or oncologist to see if you could benefit from the professional guidance of a physical therapist following a diagnosis of cancer.



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