

Exercising during and after cancer treatment

Exercise, in general, has been proven to be beneficial to both your physical and mental wellbeing. Besides improving circulation and strengthening your muscles and bones, it improves your mobility, balance and energy levels, and helps you maintain or achieve a healthy weight. In addition, it helps you cope with stress, anxiety and depression, and enhances your self-esteem.

Exercise and cancer

After being diagnosed with cancer, many people may wonder if it is okay for them to continue their exercise routine, or even start exercising. In fact, research has shown many benefits of exercise in people with cancer, whether during or after cancer treatment.

Some of these benefits include:

- Reduced cancer-related fatigue
- Reduced risk of chronic diseases
- Reduced risk of new cancers
- Reduced treatment side effects (e.g. weakness, limb swelling)
- Improves your ability to complete your cancer treatments
- Improved survival for some cancers (e.g. breast, prostate and colorectal cancer)
- Improved heart and bone function
- Improved mood and sense of wellbeing
- Controls weight, and thus reduces the risk of cancer recurrence particularly for breast, colon and prostate cancers



What kind of exercises?

Exercise guidelines recommend ***at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercises a week (with each session lasting at least 10 minutes)*** and ***resistance training at least 2 non consecutive days per week.***

Aerobic exercise uses large muscle groups and causes your heart rate to rise during the activity. *Moderate* intensity aerobic exercises should leave you breathing more heavily than usual but you will still be able to speak in short sentences. Examples include riding a bicycle, swimming or brisk walking.

Remember to warm up before each session by doing arm swings or marching in place. Gentle stretches can be done to cool yourself down after your exercise sessions.

Resistance or strength training uses weights or resistance to increase the strength and endurance of your muscles, as well as the strength of your bones. These exercises can be performed using the following methods:

- Your own body weight (e.g. sit to stand practice, stair climbing, push ups and squats)
- Free weights such as dumb bells (e.g. lifting small hand weights)
- Others (e.g. using exercise machines and elastic resistance bands)



How do I start?

Start low and go slow. Your physical activity should increase gradually over time, especially if you are not used to exercising previously. It is not advisable to try to do too much all at once, as it may be too strenuous on your body. Taking 10-minute walks 2 to 3 times a week may be a good start - then try to do a little more each time. At the very least, try to limit sedentary lifestyle (e.g. sitting or lying for long periods) as much as possible. If you already have a regular exercise routine, aim to keep to it as much as possible. For strength training, consider consulting an exercise trainer to guide you through the use of exercise equipment as well as working out a personalized exercise regime for you. You can also access community exercise programs and resources to make your exercise journey more interesting (e.g. Healthhub, ActiveSg).

Some Do's and Don'ts:

Always check with your doctor before starting any exercise program. The following are some tips to help you keep to an individualized exercise routine:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress comfortably during exercise• Drink plenty of water and take foods that are rich in protein (e.g. lean meats, eggs) so that your body can recover after exercise• Incorporate exercise into your daily life, for instance in the form of gardening, doing household chores, or using the stairs instead of the lift• Make your exercise sessions enjoyable. Listen to music during exercise or exercise together with your friends or family to keep yourself motivated• Your energy levels change from time to time. Track your energy levels and choose to exercise when you have more energy (e.g. if you feel more energetic in the evenings, plan your exercise sessions in the evenings). Conserve energy by practicing shorter sessions or split sessions• Consider other forms of activities such as yoga and tai chi, which also improves balance and has relaxation effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid exercising when you are not feeling well (e.g. if you are having severe fatigue, pain, fever). Do not feel guilty about missing a day of exercise, as rest and recovery is an important part of your wellbeing too• Avoid swimming pools (especially when undergoing radiotherapy) and crowded exercise areas when your immunity (blood counts) is low as there is an increased risk of infection

- Consult your care team for a referral to an exercise practitioner to ensure you exercise safely, especially if you have other medical problems e.g. heart conditions, breathing problems, muscle or joint problems

When to consult your cancer care team

You may want to speak to your cancer specialist or nurse about a referral to our rehabilitation physician, especially if you have specific problems like pain, arm swelling or numbness. The rehabilitation physician can do a detailed assessment to find out more about your problems, before designing and prescribing a personalized exercise prescription for you.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above information, please call Cancer Helpline at **+65 6225 5655** or approach your doctor or nurse for further details.

Useful resources

- Cancer Council Australia: Exercise for People Living with Cancer
<https://www.cancerwa.asn.au/resources/2016-06-08-Exercise-for-people-living-with-cancer.pdf>
- American Cancer Society: Physical Activity and the Cancer Patient
<https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html>

The above contents are made available as part of TEMASEK FOUNDATION-ACCESS (Accessible Cancer Care to Enable Support for Survivors) PROGRAMME, a holistic care programme to support cancer patients during their care and recovery journey.

The contents have been approved by the Cancer Education Information Service, National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), for people with cancer and their families and caregivers. However, this information serves only as a guide and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis, treatment or advice. For specific medical conditions, please seek expert medical advice from your healthcare team.

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