

Build Activity Into Your Everyday Life

Cancer

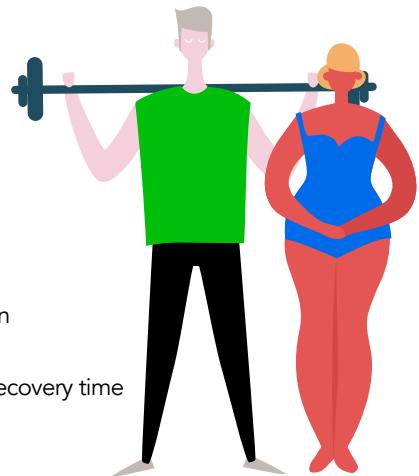
Being active is SO important for cancer. Not only in prevention but also in coping with treatment and recovery afterwards. Some benefits will be generic (such as improving energy levels, feeling better about yourself, improved sleep and fitness levels), whereas other benefits will be condition-specific, reducing the risk of serious complications in the future.

Medical professionals often refer to how physical activity can improve the quality of life for people suffering from cancer, but what does that actually mean? Physical activity can improve your mood through the release of endorphins (happy hormones), which can make you feel better about yourself and more able to cope with cancer.

Doing something for yourself can also be empowering, taking control of your health and body can be particularly motivating at this time and it can build confidence. It is known that physical activity will improve your fitness and fatigue levels as well as improving your sleep – all of which will result in you feeling stronger and more able to cope, emotionally as well as physically. Being active with friends and family can improve your mood, and help you to socialise at a time where you

Specific benefits of physical activity for cancer include:

- ① **Improved** cancer-related fatigue
- ② **Improved** anxiety and depression
- ③ **Improved** quality of sleep
- ④ **Improved** quality of life
- ⑤ **Improved** cardiorespiratory fitness
- ⑥ **Reduced** joint pain
- ⑦ **Improved** cognitive function
- ⑧ **Improved** muscle strength
- ⑨ **Reduced** hormone and metabolic dysfunction
- ⑩ **Improved** body composition
- ⑪ **Reduced** post-operative complications and recovery time
- ⑫ **Reduced** lymphoedema
- ⑬ **Improved** sexual function



otherwise may not feel like doing so, and may be a welcome distraction from the daily dealings of living with cancer.

At first you may be nervous about starting and building up your activity, especially if you haven't been active for a while. Initially you may have concerns about how tired you will be, how or where you should start, will it affect your health and treatment and could you get injured? However the evidence shows that some physical activity is better than none at all.

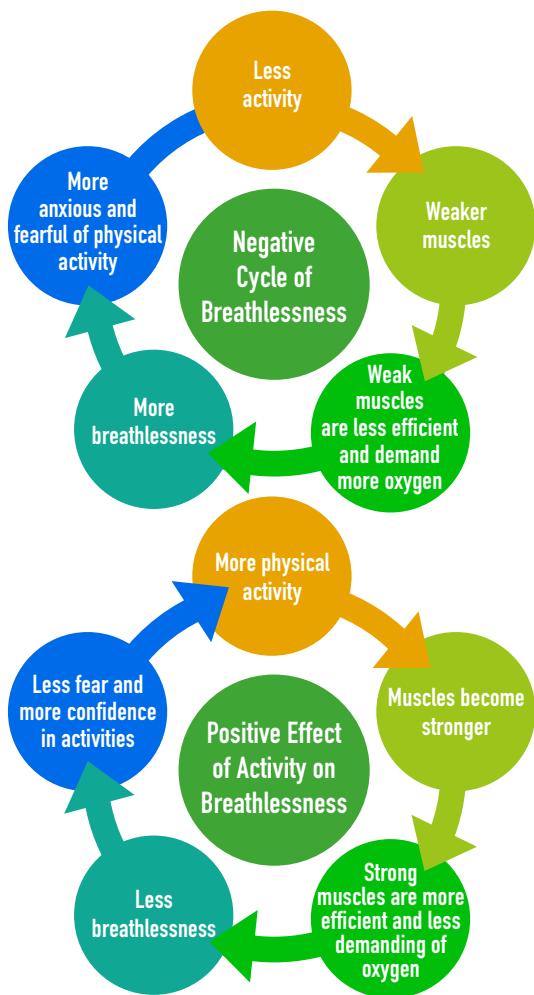
Adding as little as 10 minutes of activity a day or increasing your step count by 600–1,100 additional steps per day can have positive effects on your health.

If you are concerned speak to your doctor or physical therapist for advice on where to start, how much to do and how to progress it slowly over time. Having a good plan is the best way to stay on track.

You may also have some specific concerns relating to cancer and physical activity, and we've addressed a few below:

Concern	Advice
I am worried my heart is affected by my cancer	Some cancer treatments like chemotherapies, immunotherapies, hormones or radiotherapy can increase your risk of heart conditions. Check with your doctors, possibly even a cardiologist about your treatment and if they could affect you. Always start slowly and work at a light to moderate intensity, never vigorous, and build up gradually over the first 3 months. Ultimately, being more active will improve your heart health.
I have lymphoedema	It is still important to exercise. Wear a well-fitted compression garment while exercising. Gradually build up use of the affected arm or leg. Exercise may improve the pain in that limb. You could also try aqua or swimming.
My movement is restricted because of my surgery	You must allow sufficient time for healing following surgery. But prolonged bed rest is not healthy for your mind or body. Getting back a full range of motion in your joints and muscle strength may be slow but is an essential part of your recovery and independence.
My cancer has affected my bowel and bladder control	Speak to your doctors and physical therapists. There are treatments available and specialist physical therapy exercises which can be taught to improve pelvic floor muscles and control. Exercise will ultimately improve this condition over time.
I have altered feeling in my hands/feet, it is painful and affects my balance	This can be from the cancer and/or the treatment. Wearing supportive shoes, gloves and compression garments may help reduce sensitivity during exercise. Possibly exercising in water may be more tolerable. Or exercise with a partner or in a controlled group if you are fearful of a fall.

Another big concern that cancer patients may have is the chronic tiredness you suffer as a combination of the disease and treatment. Fatigue can be a barrier against doing more.



At first you might think the tiredness will only get worse, but little by little you will see how you are able to do a little more, or go a little further. You may still get tired or breathless but you learn to take it easy, rest and then go again.

These tips may help keep you active in your day:

- ① **Be active every day**, even on those days where you are very tired, do a little.
- ② **Know your body's (and medication) routine** and find time to be active when you are feeling strong.
- ④ **Pace your activity** and do a little more on the good days.
- ⑤ **Most people lose muscle strength during and after cancer**. Some muscle soreness can be a consequence of the disease or medication, but also a small amount of soreness can be expected from exercise. Over time your body will adapt and strengthen and this symptom will reduce.
- ⑥ **Breathlessness is often experienced in cancer**. Maybe you have lost condition and fitness due to prolonged illness or bedrest, or maybe the cancer or medication is the culprit of the breathlessness. It is normal to be a little more breathless during exercise, the added work for your lungs and heart will improve over time as you regain your fitness. Remember to start and progress slowly, keeping exercise intensity light to moderate – so you are able to talk full sentences whilst exercising.
- ⑦ **During chemotherapy cycles you will recognise days where you are unable to do anything or maybe only just a little**. Pace yourself and adjust where you can but try to do something each day, without driving yourself into exhaustion.
- ⑧ **During radiotherapy tiredness can build up over the number of treatments**. Keeping active will still benefit your help and ability to cope with treatment. A little and often may be your recipe to success.
- ⑨ **Being active through a group or class can be great social motivation and support**. An adequate warm-up and cool-down will reduce the chances of muscle pain and stiffness.
- ⑩ **Exercising outdoors or at home** may have to be an option during periods where your immune system is low (towards the end of a chemo cycle). Otherwise simply be aware of equipment used at gyms or group sessions and wash your hands frequently.

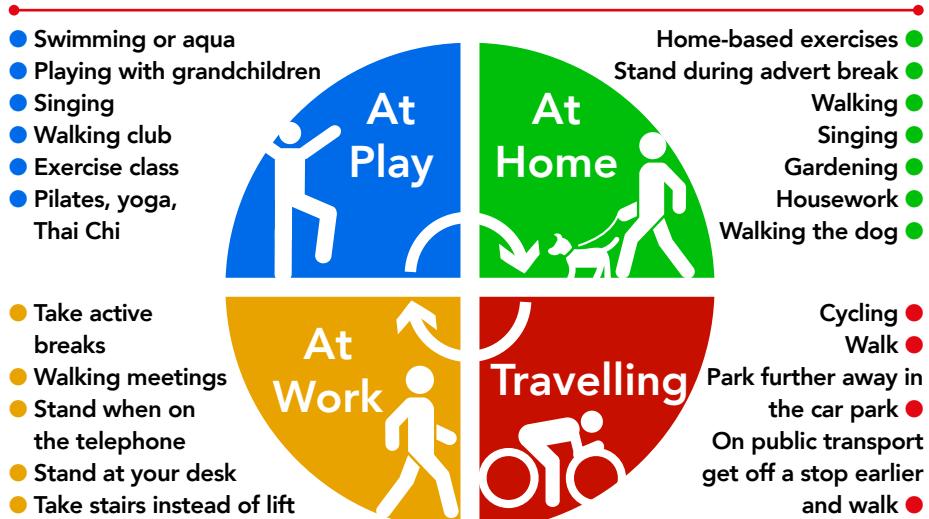
The Last Word

A good idea before starting an activity is to sit down with your therapist or even a family member or friend and write down what it is you want to achieve. Set goals, easy achievable ones initially. These will help build self-esteem and confidence. Then you can start looking from short-term easier goals (which may be as simple as walking 10 minutes every day, or achieving a walk around the block 3 times a week) to middle- and long-term ones, extending over the coming months and year.

'Action planning' is the next step. Write down what you are going to do each day or as a weekly plan. Keeping these plans, together with a daily diary, will help you stay motivated and see the improvements over time. You can use self-monitoring devices like pedometers, wrist-worn accelerometers or smartphones to keep track of your daily step count. There are also many activity apps that can be downloaded to mobile phones to help you monitor your activity levels, motivate you or provide you with daily exercise routines. Get help and advice from your physical therapist about what would best suit you

Making everyday life more active

Apart from formal exercise or group activities, you can build activity into your everyday life. Small changes will ultimately make big differences to your quality of life. Ideas for making everyday life more active include:



and your condition.

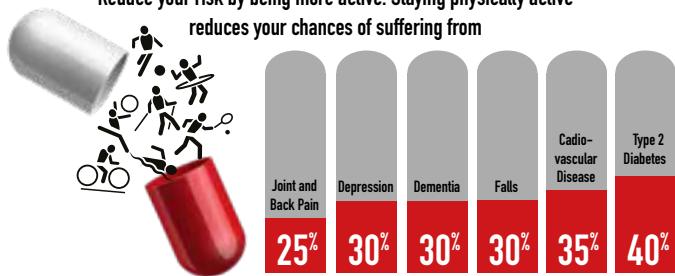
Make sure you have support – be it family and friends or a physical therapist, support group or exercise programme.

The right support will be invaluable in keeping you motivated and encouraged, particularly on those bad days, and make you accountable for changing your life!

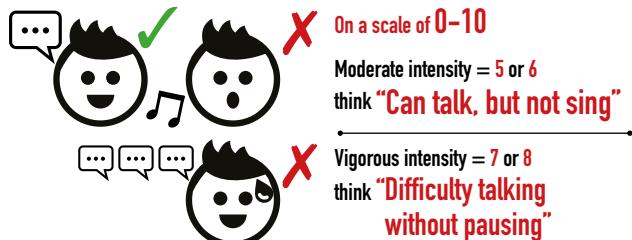
Gold Standard Exercise Recommendations for Health

If Exercise Was A Pill

Reduce your risk by being more active. Staying physically active reduces your chances of suffering from



What is Moderate Intensity Versus Vigorous Intensity Activity?



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between the Ages of 5–17?

- 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity – every day
- > 60 minutes daily will give even better health benefits
- Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic
- But should incorporate vigorous – intensity activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Between 18–64?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.



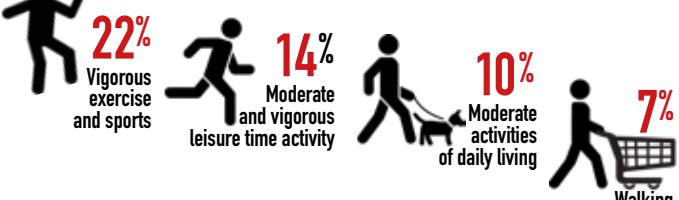
What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Over 65 Years of Age?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Activities that enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups, on 2 or more days a week
- The goal is to be as physically active as your abilities and conditions allow.



Reference: Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organisation 2018

How Activity Intensity Reduces Your Risk of Dying



Reference: Domains of physical activity and all-cause mortality: systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of cohort studies. <http://bit.ly/2S7BXOW>

First Steps to Being More Active



TIP If you are starting out try breaking your daily goal into shorter bouts of 10 minutes at a time



The information contained in this article is intended as general guidance and information only and should not be relied upon as a basis for planning individual medical care or as a substitute for specialist medical advice in each individual case. ©Co-Kinetic 2019