

Breast cancer survivorship: Exercise information



Why should I exercise?

Research shows that regular exercise offers important health benefits in cancer survivors!

- Improve mental health by reducing anxiety and depressive symptoms
- Improve physical health by improving physical function, bone health and sleep
- Reduce fatigue both during and after treatment for cancer
- Reduces risk of other chronic diseases, helps manage weight with a healthy diet

How much should I exercise?

- Any physical activity is better than none. Start by moving more and sitting less.
- Take it one day at a time by setting realistic goals for yourself, tracking them, and noting your progress over time.
- Start with low time and intensity goals then gradually add minutes over several weeks.
- To improve overall health, aim to achieve the current ACSM (American College of Sports Medicine) physical activity guidelines: 150 minutes a week (30 min x 5 days a week) of aerobic exercise, include strengthening exercises twice a week.
- Walking is a simple way to start being more active.

Is exercise safe for me?

- If you are new to exercise, talk with your treatment team before beginning an exercise program.
- It may help to meet with a physical therapist or exercise trainer to help get you started, especially if you are new to strengthening exercises.
- Does not cause or exacerbate lymphedema.
- A gentle yoga video is available on the Lifestyle Medicine site: massgeneral.org/cancer/lifestylemedicine

Let's move! Get started and keep it going!

- **Set up for success:** collect the workout clothing, shoes and water bottle that you'll need, put it out the night before if you plan to exercise in the morning
- **Plan and schedule your exercise blocks.** Putting it on your calendar provides accountability.
- **Warm up before you start exercise** (march in place, jumping jacks, slow-moderate pace walking). Cool down after you finish exercise (slow walking, gentle stretching).
- **Make it fun and social!** Ask a friend or family member to join you, choose an exercise class you have always wanted to try, or make a playlist of your favorite songs.
- **Determine your "why".** Defining why exercise matters to you provides motivation.
- **Be your best cheerleader.** A positive attitude is a powerful influence on behavior.

| | Light intensity | Moderate intensity | Vigorous intensity |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How much? | Up to 30 minutes per session | 30 minutes per session | 20 minutes per session, 3 days a week |
| How often? | As many days as you can | 5 days a week | Strength training with weights, 2 days a week |
| Walking | Walk at a slow pace | Walk at a brisk pace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk at a very brisk pace • Running or jogging |
| Other examples | Light housework, gardening, gentle yoga | Vacuuming, raking, beginner ballroom dance, yoga, Zumba | Shoveling, bicycling, swimming, salsa dance, boot camp, interval training |

Strength exercises:

- Lifting weights (hand weight, dumbbell, bar bell, kettle bells, medicine ball)
- Body weight exercises (lunge, plank, squat, push up, pull up, bridge, step up)
- Resistance band exercises (<https://www.theraband.com/exercises>)

Web-based resources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/pa-health/index.htm#:~:text=Regular%20physical%20activity%20is%20one,ability%20to%20do%20everyday%20activities>
- <https://www.aicr.org/cancer-prevention/recommendations/be-physically-active/>
- <https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2020/breast-cancer-survival-exercise>
- <https://www.massgeneral.org/cancer-center/patient-and-family-resources/supportive-care/lifestyle-medicine/exercise-videos-for-cancer-patients>
- <https://www.livestrong.org/what-we-do/program/livestrong-at-the-ymca>