

# Physical Activity

As a cancer patient, you are likely dealing with fatigue, which may make exercise seem a bit daunting. But hitting the gym can actually help reduce your symptoms.

## HOW WILL EXERCISE HELP ME?

Research demonstrates that exercise can be an important part of your cancer treatment plan because it improves:

- Anxiety and depression
- Fatigue
- Strength and endurance
- Lymphedema
- Cognitive function
- Bone health
- Heart health
- Sleep
- Pain
- Health-related quality of life



## WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I START EXERCISING?

You can start exercising as soon as possible. For best results, begin your exercise routine prior to starting your cancer treatment. This will help build strength and endurance that will improve your tolerance and function once the treatment is underway.

To get started and stay motivated, you can:

- Choose types of exercise that you enjoy.
- Ask a partner or friend to work out with you and help you stay the course.
- Keep an activity log. Each day, record your movement, how much weight you lifted, what foods you ate, how you slept, etc. You can download an activity log template to use at <https://www.movingthroughcancer.com/log>
- Set SMART exercise goals (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-bound).
- Use a step tracker to measure how many steps you take each day. Smartphones, smart watches and Fitbits can all be used as step trackers.
- **Remember that any activity is better than inactivity.**

You will need to modify your exercise routine, reduce its intensity or take a day off if:

- You recently had surgery and have sutures in place or a slow-healing wound. Talk to your surgeon before resuming your exercise routine.
- You're experiencing progressive fatigue that isn't improving with physical activity.
- You feel an increase in pain after doing strength training that doesn't resolve after one day.
- You have a fever or other sign(s) of infection.

## WHAT EXERCISES SHOULD I DO?

- **Cardio exercise:** Walking, running, swimming, biking and chair cardio
  - Start slow and build based on your prior activity and treatment status
  - Goal: 30 to 60 minutes of activity, 5 days a week
- **Strength training:** Performing basic strengthening exercises
  - Start off with no resistance and gradually progress to using weights
  - Goal: 30 to 60 minutes of activity, 3 days a week
- Moving Through Cancer's online guided exercise videos for all fitness levels  
<https://www.movingthroughcancer.com/videos-handouts>
- \* **Consult your oncology team for a more formal, supervised program if you have lymphedema, balance impairment or a history of falls, or if you need an assistive device to aid with walking.**

## SHOULD I KEEP EXERCISING POST-TREATMENT?

It is recommended that you keep exercising after your treatment is complete. You may experience lingering side effects, such as fatigue, loss of muscle mass, anxiety and cardiovascular issues, but research shows that continuing your exercise routine can help.

- Regular exercise results in 37% decrease in cancer mortality  
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7071977>
- Longer leisure time spent sitting is associated with higher risk of death in colorectal cancer survivors  
<https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/JCO.2012.45.9735>
- Regular exercise can reduce anxiety and depression in cancer survivors  
[https://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Fulltext/2019/11000/Exercise\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Cancer\\_Survivors.23.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Fulltext/2019/11000/Exercise_Guidelines_for_Cancer_Survivors.23.aspx)

