

Exercise

Exercise can help you take control of your physical and mental health and it does not have to be overly strenuous or difficult to make a difference. No matter what your fitness level before your treatment, creating a personalised exercise programme can help you become more physically active. You will experience more energy, reduce your stress levels and feel better both physically and emotionally with a healthy amount of exercise in your life.

Exercise after treatment

Increasing physical activity is generally beneficial for everyone, regardless of whether or not they have had cancer. However, studies show that exercise following cancer treatment can:

- Help you maintain or improve your physical functioning
- Reduce the impact of a number of post-treatment side-effects
- Contribute to increased self-esteem, mood and quality of life
- Help you with weight control
- Improve balance, lowering your risk of injury
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis
- Improve your circulation
- Improve your quality of sleep

Beginning an exercise programme can be a challenge and particularly so after cancer treatment. If you have never regularly exercised, then the task may feel especially daunting. You may be asking yourself: Where do I begin? What am I meant to do? How long and how often do I need to exercise?

If you exercised regularly before your cancer diagnosis, then getting back into it after treatment can be uplifting but you may find your strength and energy levels are very different which can be disappointing. Comparing yourself now to your pre-treatment self may dishearten you and hinder your motivation to begin.

Personalised Exercise

Personalised exercise is all about acknowledging your physical limitations and matching your activity to how you feel. To do this it is important to learn how to listen to your body and develop a flexible approach that helps you to make progress, while recognising that your cancer and its treatment will have affected your levels of energy and tiredness. It's also about choosing activities that fit with your personal goals and tailoring exercise to meet your needs.

For the majority of people, it is completely safe and healthy to increase physical activity following treatment, but if you are concerned at all, speak to a member of your medical care team. You'll almost certainly experience some soreness or feel muscles you haven't used for a while when you start a new activity or begin an exercise programme, but this is quite normal and all part of the process of improving your health. However, if you experience any persistent pain you should speak with your healthcare team.

You will also find that you feel very different now, just after treatment, to how you will feel after a month or a year. You will want to exercise according to how you feel and this will change as you begin to gain more energy and strength.

You'll find that when you begin it takes significantly less effort to feel exerted. For example, immediately after treatment, a short walk for only five or ten minutes may be enough. However, a few months later you will probably have the energy to walk for longer or more strenuously. The important thing to remember is to keep doing some activity as every small step will build your strength and help you to make progress.

Determine your current activity level

The first step in increasing your activity is determining how active you are now. You may have already begun this process by keeping track of your steps with the pedometer. Take some time now to think about your average week of activity. Assessing your current levels will help you to determine appropriate goals and set the right pace for achieving them.

Set goals

Setting realistic, yet personally rewarding goals will really help to motivate you. What would you like to achieve? It may be a very clear and ambitious goal such as undertaking a sponsored walk for a charity, or a more general one to keep up with the children or to do some gardening for a couple of hours. What really matters is that what you want to achieve matters to you and will give you a sense of accomplishment.

Implementing and maintaining an exercise routine may seem challenging or even impossible initially but, making progress is all about small steps. A good approach is to work out the milestones or smaller goals you can accomplish along the way.