



About Breast Cancer and Exercise

Cancer and its treatment can change your body. Exercise is one of the best ways you can keep your strength, energy, and mobility (being able to move your body as you need to). Exercise can also help you cope with [fatigue](#) caused by cancer. You should do exercises that are right for you, based on your diagnosis and any treatments you receive. Not everybody enjoys the same type of exercise. You should find an exercise that fits your interest and the needs of your body. If you don't feel comfortable exercising on your own, you can work with a physical therapist or a qualified trainer.

* Please talk with your care team before starting any exercise program *

How do I know if it's okay for me to exercise?

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) reports that exercise is safe during and after cancer treatments. The ACSM encourages exercise for cancer patients because of its positive effect on fatigue, anxiety, depression, physical function, and overall quality of life.

What will exercise do for me?

For many people, exercise can help your overall health. Exercise:

- Is the best way to keep and build your strength and energy.
- Can help you control your weight.
- Can help reduce fatigue and has been shown to help you feel better.
- Can help reduce anxiety.
- May help improve hip and trunk motion, sleep, oxygen levels in your blood, and your emotional wellbeing.
- May help decrease your risk for osteoporosis.

Can I exercise while undergoing active treatment?

In general, exercise has been shown to be safe in people who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiation therapy. During treatment, some people don't feel up to exercising, while others may find that exercise makes them feel better. You will figure out how exercise makes you feel. You don't need a lot of exercise to feel the benefits. However, inactivity can increase fatigue.

Should I be worried about lymphedema?

[Lymphedema](#) is the swelling that can happen in your body after lymph node removal or damage. If you do not have lymphedema but are worried about developing it, read "[Understanding and Decreasing Lymphedema Risk in Breast Cancer](#)." Studies have shown that women who had treatment for breast cancer can do careful, slowly-progressed arm exercises without increased risk.

If you already have it, it is important that you wear a well-fitted compression sleeve and glove or gauntlet when you are exercising. Studies show you can do arm strengthening exercises, but you will need to start with low weights and progress slowly. You should begin your exercise program with a physical therapist or a

qualified trainer certified in lymphedema therapy.

How much exercise should I do?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans suggests:

- **Aerobic exercise:** 150 to 300 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes to 5 hours) per week of moderate-intensity exercise, or 75 to 150 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity exercise.
 - **Moderate-intensity** exercise includes brisk walking, water aerobics, dancing, gardening, doubles tennis, and biking for fun.
 - **Vigorous-intensity** exercise makes you sweat and makes talking hard to do while exercising. Examples are hiking uphill, running, swimming laps, biking for speed, and jumping rope.
- **Strength training:** 2 or more sessions per week, which include exercises for major muscle groups.
- **Flexibility training:** Stretch major muscle groups on days you are exercising.

These guidelines are the same for people with or without a cancer diagnosis. If you cannot do 150 minutes of exercise, you should be as active as your body can handle.

Are there any special considerations due to my diagnosis?

While exercising is important, your diagnosis and treatment must be considered when choosing an exercise program. Some things to think about are:

1. **Surgery:** Ask your surgeon when it is okay for you to start exercising after surgery. You may have to wait 6 to 8 weeks after surgery to return to your normal exercise routine.
2. **Active chemotherapy or radiation treatment:** You may find yourself feeling very fatigued during treatment. Even if you're too tired to do your whole exercise routine, try to remain as active as possible.
3. **Risk of fracture:** Some diagnoses and medications can put you at risk for bone breaks. Talk to your care team about your risk. You can still exercise, but you should not lift heavy weights.
4. **Lymphedema:** See the section above about lymphedema.

What types of exercises can I do?

There are many different types of exercises you can do. It is important to work on your energy, strength, and flexibility when you exercise. In general, the easiest exercise is walking. You can also try yoga, hiking, biking, or any activity that is fun for you.

How can I get more information?

If you feel comfortable, you can exercise on your own. If you feel like you need help, you can see a physical therapist or trainer to get you started with an exercise program. A therapist can help figure out your exercise needs and can get you started on a safe program. Talk to your care team about your options to stay active.

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