Strength Exercises: Minimize the effects of cancer treatment on your muscles

Disclaimer: You should discuss your health risks with your provider before starting any exercise program.

During cancer treatments (and after), it is important to keep your muscles as strong as possible. Weakness can occur due to changes in activity and diet. Some medications used in cancer treatments can also contribute to weakness.

It is best to start these as soon as your cancer treatment begins, or before. Strength training exercises should be done 2-3 times per week, with a rest day in between.

There will be days when you should not do strength-training exercises.

- Strength training should not be done when your platelet count is below 50,000 due to the risk of bleeding.
- Strength training should not be done if you feel off balance or dizzy.
- If you have metastases to your bones, you should discuss the safety of strength training with your oncologist before beginning any program.

How INTENSE should this strength-training workout be?

In order for you to increase your muscle strength, you need to OVERLOAD the muscles. This means using a weight that makes the exercise difficult, but not impossible!

On a scale from 0-10, 0 indicates “no effort at all” and 10 indicates “maximum effort, I can’t do one more repetition.”

Aim for a 3-4/10 or moderate effort when you are performing these exercises. The last repetition of each exercise should be difficult and your muscles should feel tired.

The following exercises can be modified to adjust for any muscle or bone issues that you may have (i.e. low back pain, osteoarthritis, etc.). They can also be modified to increase the difficulty should you need more challenge. If you need assistance with exercises or guidance, seek out a physical therapist who specializes in cancer rehabilitation. Find a PT here: http://aptaapps.apta.org/findapt/.

Exercises

Click on each exercise to learn how to do it and precautions.

Straight Leg Raise - Quadriceps (thigh muscles)
Standing Hip Flexion – Quadriceps and Iliopsoas (thigh muscles)
Standing Hip Extension – Gluteus Musculature (buttocks)
Standing Hip Abduction – Gluteus Medius
Wall Slides & Standing Squats
Heel Lifts – Gastrocnemius and Soleus (calf muscles)
Lunges: Quadriceps, Hamstrings, Gluteus Maximus
Standing, Sitting, or Lying Alternating Elbow-to-Knee: Abdominals
Step Ups: Hip Flexors, Quadriceps, Hamstrings, Gluteus Maximus

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