

Physical Activity

Note: My NM Care corner is not intended to replace clinical care or management by a healthcare provider. If you have a medical emergency, please contact your healthcare provider.

Regular exercise can reduce the chances of some cancers coming back. During treatment, such as chemotherapy and radiation, some people may feel fatigue and exercise can help combat fatigue. Going for a walk can be the best form of exercise during treatment. Regular exercise can also help you focus on other things besides your cancer. Moderate exercise such as going for a 30-minute walk several times a week can help lower stress, improve your health, and mood.

If you're new to exercise, slowly increase the length and intensity of your exercise. Keep increasing the length of time of exercise up until you reach 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a day. If you can't be active for an entire 30 minutes, try breaking those 30 minutes into two periods of 15 minutes or 3 periods of 10 minutes.

What's Moderate vs. Vigorous Activity?

Moderate activity is anything that makes you breathe as hard as you do during a brisk walk. During moderate activities, you'll notice a slight increase in heart rate and breathing, but you may not break a sweat.

Vigorous activities generally engage large muscle groups and cause a noticeable increase in heart rate, breathing depth and frequency, and sweating.

Moderate Activities Examples:

- Hiking
- Roller skating at a leisurely pace
- Yoga
- Playing Frisbee
- Gardening

Vigorous Activities Examples:

- Jogging
- Running
- Jumping rope
- Karate
- Rock climbing

An easy way to determine your intensity is to do a "Talk Test." While engaging in activity, ask yourself if you could hold a conversation.

- If you're able to sing, you're doing light activity.
- If you're able to comfortably carry on a conversation, you're doing moderate activity.
- If you're too out of breath to talk to another person, you're doing vigorous activity.

Tips to Help You Become and Stay Active

- Start off slowly.
- Remember, doing some activity is better than none.
- Find an activity you enjoy doing.

- Set realistic goals for your activity.
- Monitor your progress by using a journal, activity tracking device, or smartphone app.
- Find people to help support you and cheer you on.
- Be realistic about your expectation regarding the benefits of physical activity and the timeline for these benefits.
- Reward yourself and your progress with healthy rewards.
- Pay attention to the small successes as you start exercising.
- Think about what situations make it especially likely for you to not be active. Try to anticipate these situations and plan ahead.

Strategies to Fit More Activity into Your Daily Life

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther away from the front door.
- Stand instead of sitting.
- Take a walk on your lunch break.
- Walk or bike to your destination instead of driving.
- Do stretches, walk in place, or use exercise equipment while watching TV.
- Take a 10 min walk in the morning and/or evening.
- Play outside with your kids.
- Take your dog for a walk.
- Take a walk when you're frustrated or bored.
- Plant/maintain a garden.
- Go for a walk with a friend instead of meeting for a meal or coffee.
- Have "walking meetings" at work.

Benefits of Physical Activity

Being physically active is one of the best things you can do for your health. It helps you maintain a healthy weight and lowers your risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Physical activity has been associated with the following benefits for cancer patients and survivors:

Reductions in:

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sleep disturbances
- Chronic conditions

Improved:

- Quality of life
- Body image and self-esteem
- Mood
- Sleep
- Sexual functioning
- Energy
- Bone health
- Muscle strength
- Cognitive functioning

Safety Precautions

Prior to starting an exercise program, it's important that you check with your doctor to ensure physical activity is safe for you. Once you've been cleared for activity by your doctor, it's important to exercise caution when becoming active to prevent injury and ensure success.

- Start slowly and gradually increase intensity and time of exercise sessions.
- Monitor your intensity throughout your exercise session.
- Take breaks as needed.
- Do short 5-10 minute bouts of activity if you're unable to do longer bouts.
- Stay hydrated.
- Keep a phone nearby in case of emergency.

Special considerations:

- If you have anemia, delay activity until anemia is better.
- If you have a weakened immune system, avoid public gyms and other public places until white blood cell counts return to safe levels.
- If you have undergone radiation, avoid swimming pools because chlorine may irritate the skin.
- If you have joint pain, engage in low impact activities like walking or biking.

If you have peripheral neuropathy, compromised balance or are concerned about falling:

- Hold onto handrails on the treadmill or other exercise equipment.
- Exercise on smooth surfaces.
- Don't wear clothes that bunch up or drag on the ground.
- Double knot your shoes.

Is Being Sedentary Linked to Health Risks?

- Yes. Research has shown that sedentary behavior, such as prolonged periods of television viewing, sitting, and lying down, is a risk factor for developing chronic conditions, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.

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