

**Physical Activity Guidelines  
While Undergoing Treatment for Cancer  
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Your exercise program should consist of safe, enjoyable activities that are at a level which makes it possible for you to complete both your daily activities and exercise program. It will be necessary to talk with your physician about what is a safe level of exercise for you. It may also be appropriate to consult with a physical therapist to establish a safe, effective exercise program<sup>1</sup>.

**What are the benefits of exercising while going through treatment for cancer?**

Participation in regular cardiovascular exercise has been shown to decrease fatigue and nausea, improve mood, physical functioning and overall quality of life for individuals undergoing cancer treatment. Furthermore, resistance exercise has been shown to also reduce fatigue, improve strength, and increase overall feelings of well-being<sup>2,3,4</sup>.

Recently, for individuals with a diagnosis of breast cancer, following these guidelines for physical activity may improve overall survival rates<sup>5</sup>.

**What activities should I do?**

Perform physical activities that use large muscle groups. Examples of these activities are walking or bicycling.

If possible, try to include some exercises that help you strengthen your muscles, like lifting weights or doing exercises with resistance.

Also, depending on the type of treatment you are undergoing, exercises to increase your range of motion, or flexibility, may be very important. Patients undergoing treatment for breast cancer should receive an exercise packet and instructions specific to their needs.

## **How hard should I exercise?**

You should exercise at a pace that is moderate. You should feel like your heart rate and breathing rate have increased but should not exercise to the point of exhaustion<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

## **How long should I exercise?**

A good goal is to exercise for 20-60 minutes, 3-5 days/week. If you have a difficult time exercising for 20 minutes at once, you can break this into 5 to 10 minute sessions, 2 to 3 times each day. If you find you are very limited, you can exercise 5 minutes, 3 times each day and increase this by 1 minute each day until you can exercise for 10 minutes at a time<sup>5</sup>.

## **What would be reason(s) to limit or stop exercising?**

Exercise is not recommended for the 24-hour period after receiving adriamycin or other cardiotoxic chemotherapy drugs. Check with your physician to learn which chemotherapy drugs are cardiotoxic. It is also recommended that you wait for 2 hours after radiation treatment before exercising<sup>7</sup>.

If your blood cell counts are low, you should consult with your physician or physical therapist about safe exercise.

If you are experiencing excessive swelling of any extremity, have unrelieved pain, nausea/vomiting, or excessive shortness of breath, stop exercising and call your doctor immediately<sup>8</sup>.

### **For more information:**

American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

The American Physical Therapy Association Oncology Section: [www.oncologypt.org](http://www.oncologypt.org)

National Cancer Institute: [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

OncoLink: [www.oncolink.com](http://www.oncolink.com)

Association of Cancer Online Resources: [www.acor.org](http://www.acor.org)

CancerSource.com: [www.CancerSource.com](http://www.CancerSource.com)

### **References:**

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4. Pinto BM, Frierson GM et al. Home-based physical activity intervention for breast cancer patients. *J Clin Oncol*. 23(15):3577-3587, 2005.
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6. Pfalzer, C. Aerobic exercise for patients with disseminated cancer. *Clinical Management*. 8(3): 28-31. 1988.
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