

Staff guide: Physical Activity

Breast Cancer



Improves
cancer-related
fatigue



Helps
depression



Helps
anxiety



Improves sleep
quality



Improves
quality of life



Improves
cardiorespiratory
fitness



Improves
cognitive
function



Improves
muscle strength



Reduces
hormone/metabolic
dysfunction



Helps joint
pain



Helps body
composition



Reduces post
treatment
complications



Helps
lymphoedema



Helps
sexual function

Minimum Guidelines For Adults



5 days a week for 30 minutes which increases heart rate and breathing so you can talk but not sing



Strength activities 2-3 x a week for large muscle groups at a level where you need a short rest before repeating the activity



If over 65 years old, do activities that challenge balance 2 x a week

- 1. Choose an activity and do it several times a week**
- 2. Increase the amount of time per session**
- 3. Make it more challenging i.e. adding speed, walking up hills, adding a weight**

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Evidence for benefits in breast cancer

Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of death by breast cancer or other causes. It also has been shown to reduce the risk of recurrence or cancer spread.

People who are already active

Encourage people who have been recently regularly physically active to continue with their physical activity. They may need to adapt to do a little less during 'not so good' phases of treatment.

Refer to physiotherapist for more advice.

Surgery

Exercise before and after surgery will help recovery. The amount and type of exercise will depend on symptoms. Seek advice from a physiotherapist if needed.

Practical advice:

- **Before surgery:** Walking, running, cycling and strength exercises are great examples of how to build fitness before surgery.
- **Recommendations:** Refer to prehabilitation (if available)
- **After surgery:** Take pain control as advised. Start by marching on the spot and then build to regular walks on the ward. Once home, build up daily walks at a pace where you feeling slightly out of breath but are still able to talk.
- **Movement:** Do range of movement exercises as prescribed by the physiotherapy team.
- **Swimming:** Consider silicone prosthesis rather than 'softies' for swimming as 'softies' tend to move around.
- **Strength training:** After 6 weeks, low level strength training can begin. Encourage to start at a lower than normal level and build up slowly.
- **Surgical recommendations:** Follow advice from the surgical team regarding returning to contact sports or heavy lifting after surgery.

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Radiotherapy

Regular physical activity can help manage and reduce radiotherapy side effects.

- **Muscle strength:** Exercise is important as radiotherapy can cause loss of muscle strength.
- **Stretching/flexibility:** Exercise can help around the arm. Continue to do these a few weeks after treatment has finished.
- **Fluid retention & swelling:** Physical activity and exercise can help reduce and manage radiotherapy related swelling.

Practical advice

- **Side effects peak:** Plan lower levels of physical activity for when the side effects peak.
- **Swimming:** is safe during radiotherapy. Do shower & moisturise. If skin is irritated, stop swimming.
- **Clothing:** Wear loose and comfortable clothing to avoid irritation and rubbing.
- **Hydration:** Drink more water than usual - radiotherapy can cause dehydration.
- **Radiotherapy position:** Just prior to radiotherapy, doing the post-treatment arm exercises can help improve tolerance to the radiotherapy position.
- **Protection:** Wear sun protection as required.

Lymphoedema

Weight management can reduce the risk of developing lymphoedema.

Being physically active is good for reducing the risk of developing & managing symptoms of lymphoedema.

It is safe to exercise when you have lymphoedema. Wear the compression garment if provided as directed by lymphoedema team.

If you have lymphoedema, wear a bra with full coverage of the chest to provide compression to the chest and breast area.

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Chemotherapy

Physical activity can help with chemotherapy tolerance and reduce side effects.

- **Bone health:** Weight-bearing plus impact exercises (stairs, walking, jumping, running) are important for bone health as chemotherapy can cause bone loss.
- **Joint & muscle pain?** Physical activity can help. Warm up and cool down helps the body to prepare and recover from activity.
- **Muscle strength:** Exercises are important as chemotherapy can cause muscle loss.

Look out for:

- **Cardiotoxicity?** Consider referral to cancer physiotherapist for physical activity support.
- **Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN):** Refer to cancer physiotherapist if CIPN impacts walking, balance, activities of daily living (ADLs) or falls.
 - A stationary bike, arm bike or seated exercises may be safer option.
 - If CIPN is painful, swimming or cycling may be more comfortable.
- **Platelets low:** Physical activity is good, but avoid activities which cause external impact i.e. risk of falls or bruising.
- **Low haemoglobin:** Do multiple short periods of daily physical activities rather than longer and fewer spells. Aim to work to a level where you are able to talk but not sing rather than use a heart rate monitor or smart watches.
- **Neutropenic:** Avoid busy or poorly ventilated gyms or pools during time of neutropenia. Try outdoors or home exercise instead. Avoid high intensity exercise until counts improve.
- **PICC line:**
 - Avoid swimming with PICC line in situ.
 - For strength training refer to physiotherapist for supervised training while PICC line is in situ.

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Hormone Therapy

Physical activity can help manage and reduce side effects of hormone therapy.

- **Fatigue:** Best treatment for cancer related fatigue.
- **Bone loss:** Weight-bearing & impact (stairs, walking, jumping) helps with reducing bone loss & reduces the risk of osteoporosis.
- **Falls & fractures:** Balance & strength exercises can help reduce the risk of falling & fractures.
- **Muscle strength:** Exercise is important to maintain muscle mass while on hormone therapy.
- **Weight gain:** High intensity exercise has been shown to help with weight management.
- **Joint pain:** Physical activity can help reduce pain.
- **Mood:** Strong evidence that physical activity improves mood, anxiety & depression.

Practical advice

- **Hot flushes?**
 - Exercise in a cool room: open windows, use a fan or go outside.
 - Wear layers of light clothing so it is easy to take clothes off if overheating.
 - Wear natural fibres such as silk or cotton instead of synthetic (artificial) fabrics.
 - Spray your face with a cool water atomiser.
 - Have a towel nearby.
- **Joint pain**
 - Warm up and cool down well to prepare the body for movement.
 - Swimming or cycling may be more comfortable forms of exercise.

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Bone Mets/Lesions

Exercise can be safe and is beneficial for improving function, quality of life and reducing risk of falls & fractures.

Practical advice:

- **Fracture risk:** If at risk of fracture or are concerned, please refer to cancer physiotherapist for guidance.
- **Prevent falls:** Encourage to exercise in a safe environment to prevent falls and support with another person.
- **Stop and seek advice:** If they feel anything uncomfortable or out of the ordinary and speak to their cancer nurse specialist (CNS), cancer doctor or physiotherapist.

Fatigue

Regular physical activity and exercise is the best treatment for fatigue.

- As little as 30 minutes a day 3 days a week of moderate physical activity can show benefits.

Practical advice

- **Short sessions:** Start off with short sessions of physical activity and build up.
- **Avoid 'boom or bust':** On good days do 80% of physical activity, and on 'not so good' days do 40%.
- **Bedrest:** Avoid total sedentary rest.
- **Record:** Keep a diary on how the fatigue responds to different activities.