

# Staff guide: Physical Activity

## Radiotherapy



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 during radiotherapy

Exercise during radiotherapy shows improvements in cardiac fitness, strength, flexibility, fatigue, quality of life & overall wellbeing.

## Physical Activity

- **Fluid retention & swelling:** Physical activity & exercise can help to reduce & manage radiotherapy related swelling.
- **Bone health:** Weight-bearing plus impact exercises (stairs, walking, jumping) is important for bone health as radiotherapy can cause bone loss.
- **Muscle health**
  - Muscle loss can be reduced by maintaining physical activity throughout.
  - If treatment is near the bladder or bowel, pelvic floor exercises may be appropriate. Start pelvic floor pre-treatment & continue until symptoms have resolved.
- **Joint & muscle ache**
  - Physical activity can help. Warm up & cool down helps the body prepare & recover from activity.
  - After radiotherapy is completed, progressive strength exercises are important as radiotherapy can cause muscle loss.
  - Dietitian referral plus strength exercises can help maintain muscle mass & limit weight loss.
- **Fatigue**
  - Combined aerobic & resistance exercise is the number one treatment for fatigue & improving energy levels.
  - Avoid 'boom & bust': on good days do 80% of physical activity and on 'not so good' days, do 40%.
  - Avoid total sedentary rest.
  - Keep a diary on how the fatigue responds to different activities.
- **Range of movement loss**
  - Stretching & flexibility exercises around the treated area can help maintain range of movement. Encourage continuing exercises until a few weeks after treatment has finished.

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### Practical advice

- **Side effects peak:** Plan lower levels of physical activity for when side effects peak.
- **Clothing:** Wear loose & comfortable clothing to avoid irritation.
- **Hydration:** Drink more water than normal - radiotherapy can cause dehydration.
- **Sun care:** While the skin in the treated area is sensitive to the sun, use a sunscreen with a high SPF. Apply the cream under clothes too, as you can get sunburnt through clothing.

### Swimming

- Swimming is fine during radiotherapy. However, advise patients to monitor skin dryness & reduce the time swimming in chlorinated water.
- Recommend showering after & moisturising.
- Stop swimming if skin irritation is noted.

### 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.