

WELCOME TO TEAM SURVIVOR NORTHWEST!

Research shows that, for most survivors, physical activity is deeply beneficial both during and after treatment.¹⁻⁴ We look forward to helping you be active and connected with other women cancer survivors. We welcome women with all types of cancer. Below are some tips to getting started. Also check out this resource on [Being Active When You Have Cancer](#).

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Before participating, talk to your doctor. It's especially important that they evaluate your risk of bone fractures and any impact on your heart (cardiovascular impact) of your cancer or treatment. If you have lymphedema, we advise working with a therapist familiar with lymphedema (usually a physical, speech, or occupational therapist).

WHAT TO EXPECT

Even if you have never exercised before, you can still generally start safely during treatment (and after).^{3,5} The goal during treatment is to maintain health to the extent possible.

Start small and build up.^{6,7}

- Some people feel best starting with walking and housework. Some will be able to start with a gentle class right away, particularly focusing on stretching, balance exercises, or chair exercises. Exercise should leave you feeling energized, not exhausted.
- You are welcome to participate in our classes at your level and learn from the teachers and classmates. If you need to take longer breaks between exercises, that is fine. If you need to leave class early, that is fine. If you need to skip a week or more, that is fine. Try to be there at the beginning to warm up properly (and chat!).
- Even 5-10 minutes makes a difference. Ideally you will work up to at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 days per week plus 2 days of strength training.⁸ Eventually, you may be ready to work up to 300 minutes per week as recommend for the general population. But...

Be patient and flexible.⁹

- Some days you will feel good, others you will not. Try to be more active on the days you do feel good, and allow yourself to rest as needed. There is no evidence that you should try to avoid activity even on treatment days, but you are your own best judge. Please talk with your doctor and with your instructor.
- Care for your mind as well as your body. Be gentle with yourself as you experience exercise differently than before.
- Be open to trying new kinds of exercise. If you loved high impact exercise or contact sports before cancer, we hope you can get back to them someday—but in the meantime, be aware of the increased risk of broken bones due to osteoporosis brought on by treatment.

Progress slowly.⁵

- This supports physical safety, helps you avoid getting discouraged, and is the recipe for getting stronger!
- Choose a variety of activities, both for physical and mental health. In all the variety, make sure you include plenty of balance exercises.
- Pay attention to how your body responds and be willing to adjust how often or in what order you participate in exercises.

- Consider using a calendar or journal to keep track of your activities and responses to them.
- If you have lymphedema, do not increase weight or intensity if you experience puffiness or swelling.
- Think of intensity in terms of how hard it *feels*. If you've worked out before, you might be used to monitoring your heart rate; know that during and after treatment, an activity may feel hard enough at a lower heart rate than before. The goal is to maintain/improve the function of your heart and lungs while avoiding exhaustion.
- Other signs that you may need to adjust exercise intensity: excessive fatigue, joint pain.

EXERCISES TO TRY

- **Balance exercises** are crucial for coping with neuropathy (nerve damage in your feet/legs that affects your balance) and protecting against falls (which are more dangerous when cancer or treatment impacts bone density). <https://www.cancer.net/blog/2016-02/balance-exercises-after-cancer-treatment>
- **Exercising with lymphedema** <https://nwlymphedemacenter.org/what-is-lymphedema/exercise-and-lymphedema/>

VIDEO RESOURCES

Watch Dr. Julie Gralow talk about the impact of exercise on cancer:

<https://www.fredhutch.org/en/news/center-news/2020/02/exercise-is-medicine.html>

[Can I Exercise During Cancer Treatment? - UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center - YouTube](#)

CITATIONS

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