Safely Training Cancer Survivors

I have been an IDEA member for 13 years and look forward to receiving *IDEA Fitness Journal* every month. I read the news item "Weightlifting and Lymphedema Debate Continues" (Making News, April 2011) with interest and would love to add an additional perspective as an ACSM personal trainer with a primary focus on working with cancer patients and survivors. My training and experience in this area are through the University of Northern Colorado's Rocky Mountain Cancer Rehabilitation Center, where I received a cancer exercise specialist title. To date, I have trained and worked with more than 300 cancer patients from the time of diagnosis through survivorship.

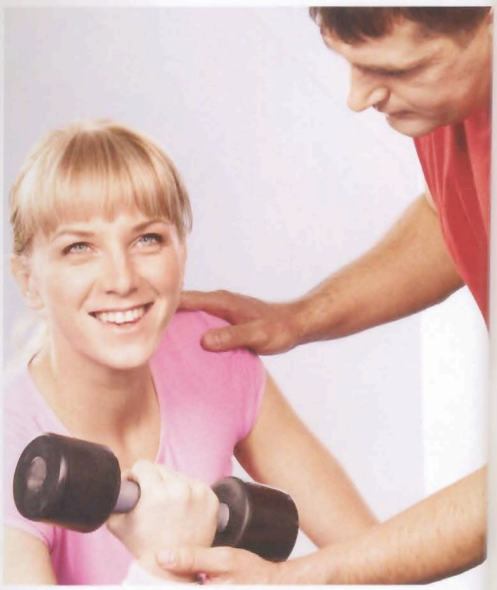
With 28 million people [worldwide] living with cancer—and that number steadily growing—it's imperative to educate personal trainers and provide the tools they need to work safely and effectively with their cancer-survivor clientele. This article on lymphedema did a great job educating readers that exercise should be initiated at a low intensity and increased gradually. However, I think it's worth mentioning the other precautions and guidelines that are advised to further reduce any risk of developing lymphedema.

The National Lymphedema Network [NLN] guidelines state, "The majority of individuals who are at risk for developing lymphedema can safely perform aerobic and resistive exercise using the 'at risk' body part when . . . wearing a compression garment."

Although lymphedema may not be evident in "at risk" individuals, the lymphatic system may function well below the normal range (Goltner et al. 1988). Exercise can trigger lymphedema by increasing lymph production to the point where it exceeds the lymphatic system's ability to remove fluid. The temporary overload may not produce immediate swelling. However, repeated episodes may add up and lead to chronic lymphedema. Therefore, the [NLN] recommends that "even 'at risk' individuals may reduce their risk of developing lymphedema during exercise by wearing a well-fitted compression garment."

Other considerations to reduce the risk of lymphedema while exercising include the following:

- Exercise in a temperature-controlled environment. It is not advised to exercise in extreme temperatures. Exercising in cold temperatures can cause dryness and cracking of the skin, increasing the chance for infection and lymphedema. Exercising in extreme heat can cause the "at risk" limb to swell.
- Exercise in moderation, making sure to have 48 hours of rest between sessions.



The jury might be out about whether or not exercise may or may not decrease the risk for lymphedema. Either way, the myriad benefits of exercise far outweigh any possible risks for cancer survivors. Exercise has been shown to decrease the chance of recurrence by [as much as] 50%; reduce the risk for osteoporosis; help stave off unwanted weight gain; and improve body image, self-confidence and overall quality of life. Exercise dramatically improves cancer survivors' lives!

Laura Rosencrantz
Owner, Inpower
Portland, Oregon

References

Burt, J., & White, G. 2005. *Lymphedema: A Breast Cancer Patient's Guide to Prevention and Healing* (2nd ed). Alameda, CA: Hunter House.

Goltner, E., et al. 1988. The importance of volumetry, lymphscintigraphy and computer tomography in the diagnosis of brachial edema after mastectomy. *Lymphology, 3,* 134–43. >>

We Want to Hear From You!

Send your letters and opinions to Ryan Halvorson, *IDEA Fitness Journal* Fitness Forum, 10455 Pacific Center Ct., San Diego, CA 92121-4339; fax them to him at (858) 535-8234; or e-mail them to rhalvorson @ideafit.com. You may also leave a voice mail letter in the editorial voice mail box at (858) 535-8979, ext. 239. (For general membership questions or information, however, please e-mail member services at member@ideafit.com.) We reserve the right to edit letters for length or clarity.

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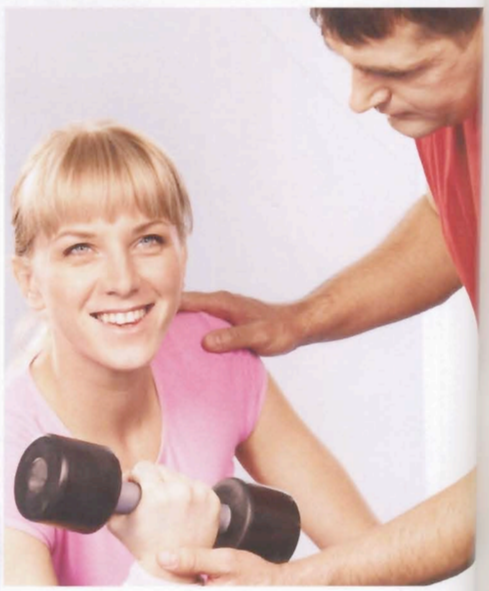

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