

Cancer patient gets stronger with exercise

InPower | Barbara Mason gains strength, balance and emotional and mental benefits

By **NANCY DOW**
THE OREGONIAN

Who: Barbara Mason, 59, Portland

Stats: 5 feet 6 inches; 170 pounds

Then and now: Mason grew up in Chicago in a family of 10 children. She moved to Portland in 1993; her 19-year-old son attends Reed

My workout

College. She's active in her church and, as a volunteer for the Leukemia and Lymphoma

Society, provides peer support for people newly diagnosed with cancer.

Fitness past: She's always been an active outdoors lover and has stayed in shape playing tennis and racquetball, walking, hiking and practicing yoga.

In 2000, Mason was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a cancer that weakens the bones. She is in remission after chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant.

Fitness now: She participates in InPower, a free exercise program for cancer patients through Cancer Care Resources. The 90-minute classes are held Tuesdays and Thursdays at Mittleman Jewish Community Center. Mason needed to improve her strength and balance following chemotherapy. Treatment had resulted in nerve damage and advanced osteoporosis and fatigue was making day-to-day activities difficult.

She does exercises for strength, flexibility and range of motion, mainly using weight machines as free weights are hard on her back. For cardio she rides a recumbent bike 20 to 30 minutes during the class. She walks three miles five days a week as part of her goal of taking 10,000 steps a day.

Her favorite part of working out is the free yoga class she takes twice a week at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. The 90-minute class for women cancer patients is taught by a cancer survivor.

Results? After 10 weeks on the InPower program Mason reports an improved energy level and bet-

ter balance. Previously she had been falling about once a week but is now much steadier on her feet. She can lift more weight, and her workout has improved her mental and emotional state. "The group psychology helps," she says. "Having the support of peers is always going to improve your attitude. We're all struggling so it's not as embarrassing as being in a health club." She's also been able to stop using the exercise band she wore because of her weakened spine.

Nutrition: Mason was thin before her diagnosis and expected to stay that way. But she gained 40 pounds in four years from medications that increased her appetite. She is "very slowly" losing the weight with a vegetarian, Mediterranean-type diet. She eats a lot of fruit, vegetables and grains and says it's not a hard diet to maintain.

She also eats a lot of dairy in an effort to get the calcium she needs through diet rather than supplements. She takes vitamin B-6 and alpha-lipoic acid for nerve damage. She also takes iron but says in general she's not a big pill taker.

In the future: Mason is happy to maintain her current activity and says it's hard to make long-range plans. She wants to stay in remission and see her son graduate from Reed. All in all, she says, she's doing really well. She'll continue with her support group and volunteer work.

In the meantime, she gets to "practice living in the now. It affects your philosophy of life," she says. "People have become my focal point."

If you'd like to share your workout with readers — or know someone whose workout you'd like to read about — send name, age, daytime phone number and workout details to Nancy Dow, My Workout, The Oregonian, 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, OR, 97201 or send a fax to 503-294-4039. We encourage submission of one or two recent, high-quality digital photos of you working out, with captions, along with your workout details. Digital images should be at least 3.2 megabytes. Photos should be well-lighted, in focus and with sharp resolution. Indoor photos should be taken with flash. Send images as JPEG attachments to nancydow@news.oregonian.com



Cancer weakened Barbara Mason but workouts have improved her energy level and balance. She can lift more weight and her workout has also improved her mental and emotional state.