

# Exercise

## The How and Why for Cancer Patients

by Laura Rosencrantz



Laura Rosencrantz guiding her client through a comprehensive exercise program.

While exercise during chemotherapy treatment may seem counterintuitive for cancer patients who feel extremely fatigued or nauseous, we are continually learning how important it is. Exercise diminishes many psychological and physical ailments often felt by cancer patients, such as anxiety, depression, constipation, fatigue and insomnia.

Additionally, exercise has been shown to improve the “chemo completion rate.” Patients are more likely to receive their scheduled chemotherapy dose without the delays caused by severe side effects. This, in turn, improves the success rate of the treatment and overall outcomes.

In the past, people diagnosed with cancer were automatically advised to rest and avoid physical activity. This recommendation may still be necessary if movement produces severe pain, rapid heart rate or breathlessness. However, for many people, regular exercise is extremely beneficial.

Studies have suggested that exercise during and after cancer treatment may increase your overall chance of survival by nearly 50 percent and may decrease your chance of recurrence by 50 percent. These are staggeringly *positive* percentages for people fighting cancer.

### Getting Started

Beginning regular exercise can be daunting for anyone. When you’re feeling extremely fatigued, weak or nauseous, getting up and moving may seem impossible. Begin slowly and progress as you are able.

If you had been exercising regularly prior to your diagnosis, consider adjusting your intensity and duration, but be sure to stay active during your treatment. If you’ve never exercised before, are currently sedentary or are already experiencing severe side effects, start simply by walking. Even walking two to five minutes a few times throughout the day has shown to have significant benefit.

Adjust your exercise depending upon how you’re feeling each day. Do what you can when you can. If you are feeling extremely fatigued or anemic, try break-

ing up your exercise into short increments throughout the day. If you feel burdened by poor balance or are unsteady due to muscle weakness or neuropathy, then consider a change to your mode of exercise by using a stationary bike on low resistance instead of walking.

### Consider Help

If you are having difficulty getting started or have health issues that require recommended exercise restrictions, contact your doctor or a qualified personal trainer. “Cancer-certified” personal trainers are a growing field. They can design a program that will consider a patient’s current health condition and treatment plan, be familiar with potential short- and long-term side effects resulting from treatment or the cancer itself, and have the knowledge to adapt and change the exercise program to support the well being of the patient on a daily basis.

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## Suggestions for an Exercise Program



- Include physical activity that uses large muscle groups. This could include aerobic activity such as walking, swimming, gardening, dancing or cycling.
- Exercise at a low to moderate intensity level. Make sure you are able to talk comfortably without becoming breathless.
- Stay hydrated before, during and after your activity.
- Try to do what you can when you can, and avoid inactivity.



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For example, if you have bone disease in your spine, the trainer would inform you to avoid heavy lifting, overhead exercises using weight and rotational exercises. Ultimately, the goal is to safely diminish side effects resulting from treatment, retain or regain as much strength as possible, and increase the overall chances of survival.

If you would like to work with a trainer, look for someone who is certified by a nationally accredited organization such as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) or the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), and it is very

important that the trainer you choose has additional cancer-specific training. Make sure he or she is familiar with your past and present medical conditions, your diagnosis and your treatment plan and is able to adapt and modify your program appropriately.

**Remember: It is important to get your doctor's consent before beginning any exercise program.**

Exercise should be an important part of your cancer treatment plan. The more physically fit you are, the easier it will be for your body and mind to tolerate chemotherapy, radiation and other invasive treatments. Ready to start?

*Laura Rosencrantz is the founder of Inpower, one of the few customized fitness programs in the country designed specifically for cancer survivors. She received her B.S. in exercise and movement science from the University of Oregon, her Cancer Exercise Specialist title was received from the University of Northern Colorado, she trained at Rocky Mountain Cancer Rehabilitation Center, and she holds an ACSM personal trainer certification. For more information about Laura and Inpower, visit [www.inpowerfitness.com](http://www.inpowerfitness.com).*



## Tips for Success

- Talk with your physician, your physical therapist or your personal trainer, who can create an individualized program and help keep you accountable.
- Create a support system. This might include your spouse, your partner, a colleague, a friend, a neighbor or a family member.
- Set realistic goals.
- Pace yourself.
- Pick a time of day that you are likely to have the most energy.
- Use a pedometer, a logbook or a smartphone app to track your progress.
- Find something you enjoy and is fun for you to do.