

Cancer Wellfit Newsletter from Journal of the American Medical Assoc.

Exercise can improve Breast Cancer Survival;

A few hours of walking or other exercise each week cancer survivors live longer. The finding could give women another way to boost beating breast cancer experts said. "Women with breast cancer have little to lose and much to gain from exercise", Said the author Michelle Holmes, MD,DrPH of Harvard Medical School. We already know that (breast cancer patients who exercise) have better mood image, and better self-esteem.

Women who have undergone the group classes have reported benefits to fitness levels, confidence, their ability to deal with the side-effects of chemotherapy and hormone treatment researchers hope the classes will also reduce the risk of the cancer returning.

Questions from Forum Members

The first question is in three parts:

1. There is a wealth of advice on starting an exercise program for people who are not currently exercising; however, there is not as much advice on starting an exercise program for survivors during and after cancer treatment. What are some of the best ways for a survivor to begin an exercise program if he or she is not currently exercising?
2. If a survivor feels really poorly during and after treatment, what are three most important steps they can take to begin or maintain an exercise program that will be beneficial but not make them feel worse?
3. How can a survivor begin or maintain an exercise program and not lose weight when weight loss avoidance and/or appetite loss is a concern?

Second question:

I am 39/almost 40 years old, a rectal cancer survivor. I recently had a DEXA(?) scan showing that I have low bone density - likely as a result of chemotherapy and radiation treatments which were completed about 14 months ago. My internist tells me that I am at risk for fractures (lower back is a bit worse than the hip reading). I have gotten back to doing all normal activities for the most part, and want to get back to exercising regularly. I've been doing a restorative yoga class for about a year, playing with my children, walking, am starting my old volleyball league for the fall,

skiing with my husband and kids this winter, etc.. Do you have any advice or cautions for me?

Answers to these questions from Mary:

First and most important is to have a honest conversation with your doctor. Let them know what kind of normal activities that you would like to get back into or start. Do not be general on this let them know that you are going to play golf, softball, volleyball, train for a marathon ect.. If they give you the ok with no limitation then lets get going. If you are just starting off with a exercise program then invest in yourself and work with a qualified trainer/instructor to get the best program for you. Start off slow and build a program/routine that is a life time investment in you!

During treatment exercise is probably the last thing you want to do, but studies show that if you can just do a small amount it will improve your appetite, sleeping, nausea, and over all feeling. Go slow and do what you can. Losing weight when you do not have weight to lose....exercise has been shown to improve the appetite.

There are many low impact exercises that you can start off with and build on. Walking: start off slow maybe just around the block, add distance as you can, increase speed, movement of arms, add some lunges, walk backwards, mix it up.

Swimming: If you are not a lap swimmer -try just water walking, add a floatation belt and deep water jog, water aerobic class, lap swim. Again start out slow and add as you can. Check out your local Health Clubs and ask for classes that would be appropriate for you! Do research on articles that list all the benefits of exercise during and after treatment!

Most important INVEST in YOU!