

Exercise advice for during and after your treatment

This information is to help you get started with exercise during and after your cancer treatment and to guide you in making progress with exercise.

Why exercise and what are the benefits?

- Studies have shown that physical activity tends to decrease significantly for many people after cancer diagnosis and treatment. This tends to lead to an increase in symptoms such as fatigue or tiredness as your body loses fitness.
- Overall, this can affect your quality of life and impact on the things that you used to enjoy doing. Exercise can be one way to help overcome this.
- There is also evidence highlighting that regular exercise may help you to lower the risk of the cancer returning, depending on the type of cancer you have.
- Exercise can help lift your mood and improve your confidence.
- Exercise can help reduce the risk of other problems such as: osteoporosis, heart disease, weight issues and joint problems.

How much should I exercise?

It used to be recommended to rest as much as you could during treatment. Although it is still important to rest, it is helpful to try and do a little exercise even when you are tired. Exercise is proven to help with some of the side effects of treatment including nausea, fatigue and pain. Regular exercise can also help you to regain your strength and stamina after treatment.

The Government recommends that we should all do moderate exercise or activity five times a week for 30 minutes, but during and immediately after your treatment this may be too much for you. However, you can still get benefit if you break the 30 minutes into three lots of 10 minute sessions. Everyone is an individual so it is about finding the right balance for you and hopefully the exercises shown will help get you started.

It is important to remember to drink plenty of fluids before and after exercising. A healthy diet will help you gain the maximum benefit from exercise and is an important aspect of your recovery. If you are planning to increase your activity levels you should also increase your energy and protein intake to maintain your weight.

If you have a poor appetite or have experienced recent weight loss, information is also available in The Royal Marsden booklet *Eating well when you have cancer*. This and others are available through The Royal Marsden Help Centre.



Is it safe for me to exercise?

If you are unsure if you should be exercising, ask either your GP or your doctor at the hospital.

Do not exercise until you have seen a member of the medical team, if you are unsure, or have any of the following:

- Heart condition or an irregular pulse
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Altered blood counts
- IV chemotherapy within the previous 24 hours
- Dizziness or blurred vision
- Feeling sick
- Recent or new pain.

How far should I push myself when I exercise?

As already mentioned, the amount of exercise you do will vary between individuals. You will need to find the right balance for you. If you feel very tired after exercising or activity then you may be doing too much. The next time you exercise or carry out an activity, it may be better either to reduce the amount of exercise or to work less hard.

It is good to gradually increase the pace at which you exercise so that it becomes more of an effort than a gentle walk. As a rough guide you should work at a level that makes you feel a little short of breath, but are able to speak a sentence at the same time.

Suggested exercises

- The following exercises should be performed in a comfortable, straight backed chair, with or without arms. You can try and complete all exercises or pick the ones you find most useful.
- Guidance is provided on the number of repetitions for each exercise but remember that everyone is different and if you find the number too challenging, reduce the number and gradually increase as you feel able.
- If you find the exercises too easy, try and repeat each set twice.
- Make sure you **do not** hold your breath with each exercise - try and keep your breathing nice and relaxed throughout.
- If you start to feel unwell, dizzy or have difficulty breathing then stop. If symptoms continue, contact your medical team.



Shoulder shrugs

Sit comfortably in the chair with shoulders and arms relaxed.

Bring your shoulders up to your ears and slowly relax them back down.

Repeat 6 times.





Arms forwards and up

Sit away from the back of the chair.

Stretch your arms forwards from the shoulders and back and then upwards to the ceiling.

Bring your arms back to shoulder level and then repeat again.

Repeat 12 times.



Pelvic tilting or rocking

Sit away from the back of the chair.

Sit up tall making an arch in your spine keeping your shoulders relaxed, slowly let your pelvis rock back making a curve in your back the other way.

Try and make the activity happen from your tummy and not shoulders and head.

Repeat 6 times each way.



Seated marching on the spot

Sit away from the back of the chair.

Sit up tall, lift each leg, one at a time as if you are marching on the spot.

Try to maintain good posture throughout keeping your tummy tight.

Repeat 12 times with each leg.



Trunk rotation

Sit away from the back of the chair.

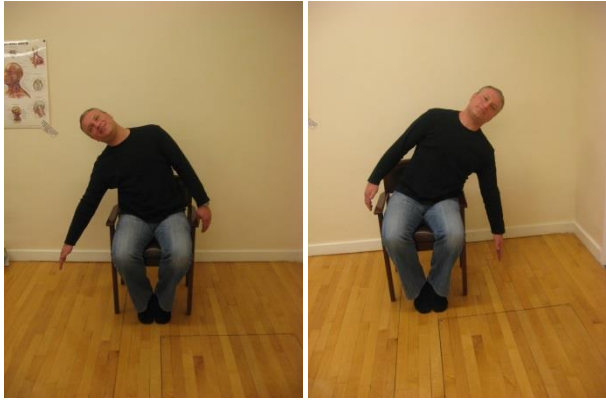
Cross your arms over your chest and turn one way, keeping hips straight.

Slowly return to the middle and turn the other way.

Ensure you maintain good posture throughout.

Repeat 6 times each way.





Side bends

Sit away from the back of the chair.

Reach down to one side with your arm bending at the waist.

Slowly return to the middle and reach to the other side.

Ensure you maintain good posture throughout.

Repeat 6 times each way.



Knee extension with foot flexed

Sit away from the back of the chair, keeping back straight.

Lift one leg out straight and bend foot back towards you.

You may feel a pulling in the back of your leg.

Try and hold position for a count of 3 and relax.

Repeat with the other leg.

Ensure you maintain posture throughout.

Repeat 12 times with each leg.



Heel/toe taps

Sit away from the back of the chair, keeping back straight.

Alternate coming up onto your toes and heels, try and do this slowly to maximise the movement.

You will feel a stretch in your calf muscles.

Repeat 12 times.





Sit to stand or intention to stand

This is a great exercise to start to strengthen your leg muscles.

Sit away from back of the chair then lift your bottom a small distance off the chair.

Stand up from the chair without using your hands.

Come forward over your feet and then up tall.

Sit back down in a controlled way without using your hands.

Repeat 12 times.

You may find it too difficult to do this without using your arms, therefore use your arms to try to help yourself at first.

If standing is too difficult, attempt to stand by pushing through your arms and lifting your bottom a small distance from the chair. This is a good start to strengthening your leg muscles.

How do I increase my exercise or activity?

Once you leave hospital, you may wish to progress with the exercises that you have been doing. Be careful not to try and progress too quickly as you will find that just being back at home will tend to increase the amount of activity you are doing.

There are two main ways that you can progress with exercise:

- You can increase the length of time you exercise for – you could repeat the above exercises twice through.
- You can increase the intensity so that you are doing the exercise at a faster pace or use small weights when exercising.

You could add in other exercises such as walking or other activities such as gardening, household chores, swimming and golf. With all of the above, remember to exercise at a moderate level.

Where can I get more information about exercise?

Macmillan

www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/health-professionals/programmes-and-services/physical-activity.html



Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/physical-activity-and-cancer

- There are other cancer-specific charities that may provide more relevant advice and guidance for you.
- Department of Health initiatives such as Change for Life, encourage a healthy lifestyle incorporating information on diet and exercise www.change4life.nhs.uk
- Further advice can be found via www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/
- Many local councils provide schemes often together with GPs and primary care services. To find out more about what is available in your area, please ask your GP or look at local resources such as your library or council information service and local pharmacies.
- You can also contact the Physiotherapy Department for further advice:

Sutton: 020 8661 3098

Chelsea: 020 7808 2821

