

Cancer Survivorship & the Importance of a Walking Program



As a survivor of cancer, rehabilitation is crucial for managing treatment side effects and improving your quality of life. One of the best ways to increase circulation and combat cancer related fatigue is having a walking program.

How much movement do you need as a cancer survivor?

According to the American College of Sports Medicine it is recommended that survivors of cancer get a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week. Walking 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, would satisfy the minimum requirements of aerobic activity.

Benefits of a walking program for survivors

- Improve your quality of life and physical function
- Reduce cancer-related fatigue
- Decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Enhance cardiovascular and respiratory fitness
- Build social connections and emotional support when walking with others

Designing a walking program for cancer survivors:

1. Get Medical Clearance

Before starting, consult your healthcare team to ensure walking is safe for you.

2. Start Slowly and Build Gradually

Begin with 5-10 minutes of walking at a comfortable pace. Pay attention to how you feel-monitor fatigue, heart rate, breathing, and any swelling.

3. Track Your Progress

Use a calendar, smartwatch, smartphone, or pedometer to record your walks, duration, and steps. Tracking helps motivate and show your improvement over time,

4. Have a Backup Plan

On days when walking outside isn't possible due to weather or fatigue, try low-impact activities like yoga, Tai Chi, or gentle stretching.

5. Walk with a Buddy

Walking with a friend or family member adds safety, motivation, and social support. Always carry your phone and let someone know your route.

Tips for Safe and Enjoyable Walking

- Wear comfortable, supportive shoes
- Choose safe, even walking surfaces
- Warm up and cool down with gentle stretches
- Stay hydrated, especially in warm weather
- Dress appropriately for the weather, layering as needed

Remember

Feeling better through and after cancer treatment can be challenging, but with early intervention and a comprehensive management plan, you can improve your symptoms and quality of life. Always consult with your healthcare team to tailor these strategies to your specific needs.

Additional Resources

- Contact your healthcare provider for personalized advice.
- Visit local cancer support groups for community support.
- Explore online resources for more information on a walking program.



International Cancer
Rehabilitation Foundation®

References: Doherty DJ, Wilson CM, Boright LE. *Oncology Rehabilitation: A Comprehensive Guidebook For Clinicians*. Elsevier: Missouri; 2023, Stubblefield MD, O'Dell MW. *Synopsis of Clinical Oncology*. Springer Publishing Company. 2010. ISBN: 1936287005, Campbell KL, Winters-Stone KM, Wiskemann J, et al. Exercise Guidelines for Cancer Survivors: Consensus Statement from International Multidisciplinary Roundtable. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2019;51(11):2375-2390. doi:10.1249/MSS.0000000000002116

Author: Dr. Katie Schmitt, PT, DPT, CLT, Board-Certified Clinical Specialist in Oncologic Physical Therapy.

Editor: Diana Presno, M.D.