



Exercising with breast cancer

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise is an important part of breast cancer prevention, treatment and recovery. It promotes wellbeing and helps reduce pain, nausea, insomnia, fatigue and other treatment side effects. Inactivity and maintaining an unhealthy weight can increase cancer risk so it's important to stay active and maintain a healthy weight.

Women with breast cancer who exercise regularly have a lower risk of dying of breast cancer than those who exercise less. Exercise boosts self-esteem, energy levels, the immune system and your general health.

Ask your cancer specialist for exercise advice throughout and after your treatment. If you have had surgery, you may have a limited range of movement and strength in the chest, arms and shoulders, which gentle exercise can ease. The current opinion is that exercise does not cause or worsen lymphedema but may even lessen symptoms.

You can enjoy regular exercise with friends, family or a specific healthcare and fitness professional who specializes in exercise and breast cancer. Choose an activity you enjoy!

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.

How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer. If stamina is a problem, try three 10-minute intervals of exercise throughout the day.
What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities walking, swimming, cycling, water aerobics or some forms of yoga —choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health. If you are having radiation treatment, sweating may irritate your skin so choose appropriate and comfortable clothes. Try and keep your skin dry to avoid irritation and reduce infection.

What will it do for me?

Exercise can help increase your energy and strength and improve heart and lung health, which may have been affected by some cancer medicines. Regular exercise reduces the risk of breast cancer, its recurrence and your risk of death from it.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with very light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Stop exercising if you experience any discomfort or pain, and contact your doctor, healthcare provider or lymphedema specialist.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 2 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Exercises may need to be modified if you have had surgery or treatments that may have caused muscle weakness or limited your range of movement.

What will it do for me?

Regular strength training improves muscle tone or weakness after surgery. It also boosts the quality of your life by making chores and recreation activities easier.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week if necessary, and gradually work towards three.
How hard:	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.



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How long:	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, or simple home balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.

Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

Exercise safety

Stop exercising and talk to your doctor if you:

- get weaker or start losing your balance
- have pain that gets worse
- experience extreme fatigue
- a low red blood cell count (anemia), platelet count or white blood cell count.
- have new symptoms such as swelling, headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, shortness of breath, new numbness, heaviness or tingling in your arms, shoulders or chest.

Compression garments you have been given should always be worn during exercise.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Helpful resources

The Canadian Cancer Society provides a series of exercises to do after breast cancer surgery. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/publications/exercises-after-breast-surgery>

The Canadian Cancer Society gives great tips for getting active while you are undergoing treatment. <http://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-journey/living-with-cancerphysicalactivity-during-cancer-treatment/?region=on>

The Canadian Cancer society also has a Cancer Information Service, with a team who can help you find local resources, including activity programs. Call 1.888.939.3333.

The Canadian Cancer Society has created a Community Service Locator that can help you find exercise services and programs near you. <https://csl.cancer.ca/en>



Scan for more physical activity resources!

