



# Exercising with bowel 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

Exercise significantly decrease the risks of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, obesity, hypertension and osteoporosis, which may increase as a result of inactivity due to your illness. Regular exercise increases energy levels and maintains muscle strength, helping you when returning to daily living.

Bowel cancer survivors who exercise regularly lower their risk of bowel cancer recurrence and have less complications

Regular exercises significantly improve heart health, which is sometimes affected by the medicines used to treat bowel cancer, and also reduces the nausea and tiredness associated with a variety of cancer treatments and recovery. Exercise such as regular walking, bicycling, swimming, dancing and recreational sports help boost self-esteem and energy levels.

Choose activities you enjoy and that suit your lifestyle, such as gardening, walking to the mall, meeting up with friends, or playing with your children or grandchildren in the park.

You can enjoy regular exercise with friends, family or a health and fitness professional who specializes in exercise and cancer—keep yourself motivated by choosing an activity you enjoy!

You may need to modify your exercise plan around symptoms and treatment.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.** If you have a stoma, please refer to the 'Exercising with a stoma' information sheet.

## 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

<b>How much:</b>	Aim for at least <b>150 – 300</b> minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least <b>75–150</b> 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.
<b>How hard:</b>	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.

<b>How long:</b>	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.
<b>What type:</b>	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: Walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, gardening, swimming, roller skating, water aerobics—choose activities you enjoy! Team sports such as tennis, baseball, and volleyball are great social activities too. Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.

### What will it do for me?

*Exercise significantly helps to reduce the risk of bowel cancer recurrence and boosts the immune system, decreases inflammation in the bowel and reduces insulin levels—all factors likely to have an effect on bowel polyp risk. It is important for bowel cancer patients to continue to exercise as it can significantly reduce the side effects of cancer treatment and improve overall physical and mental health.*

## Build strength

<b>How much:</b>	At least twice a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 8-10 times. Try 2 sets of each exercise.
<b>What type:</b>	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. Household chores also help improve muscle strength and maintain joint, bone and muscle health.

### What will it do for me?

*Strength exercises will help manage bowel cancer symptoms, medicine side effects, improve mobility, slow functional decline and maintain your quality of life.*

## Improve balance

<b>How much:</b>	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week if necessary, and gradually work towards three.
<b>How hard:</b>	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10-15 times.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	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.



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## What will it do for me?

Practising 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 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 to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! **Most importantly: some physical activity is better than none.**

## Exercise safety

Patients on treatment should take caution to avoid:

- Vigorous exercise if you have a low red blood cell count
- Heavy weight training while in active treatment
- Using public gym equipment if you have a low white blood cell count
- Swimming in public hot tubs, pools, lakes and rivers.

Always exercise safely and effectively. Remember: If it feels too difficult or it hurts, stop what you're doing!

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

Colorectal Cancer Canada gives tips on physical activity, diet and other lifestyle topics for individuals living with colorectal cancer. <https://www.colorectalcancer.ca/support/living-with-cancer/>

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-cancer/physical-activity-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>

