

Your Next Step After Treatment: Exercise as a Tool to Reduce Risk of Cancer Recurrence

Why Exercise Matters

This isn't just about staying healthy. New research shows that regular, guided exercise after cancer treatment may help lower the risk of your cancer coming back – and **potentially** improve survival outcomes. And the benefits don't come from extreme workouts - they come from steady, moderate movement you can build into your week.

What the CHALLENGE Trial Proved

A large international study followed patients with stage II/III colon cancer after chemotherapy. Those who participated in a structured 3-year exercise program **showed**:

- 28% **reduced** risk of cancer recurrence,
- 37% **reduced** risk of death from any cause **in this specific study**

These results are **comparable to** some medication interventions. In fact, we now consider this an **important component** of survivorship care.

Important note: These results are from one study of colon cancer patients. While promising, individual results may vary, and more research is needed to confirm these benefits across different cancer types.

Who Is This For?

The study included patients with stage II/III colon cancer who had completed chemotherapy and could walk comfortably for six minutes. If you're recovering from any type of cancer and feel ready to start moving, this **approach may be beneficial for you**. However, **individual responses to exercise vary**, and what works for one person may differ for another. Let's talk about it.

What You'll Be Doing

Your plan will be:

- Safe and tailored to your needs
- Focused on aerobic activity (like walking, cycling, or swimming)
- Guided by exercise professionals trained in cancer survivorship

We'll start where you are - and build gradually.

How to Start Safely

- Before starting:
 - Talk to your oncologist
 - If you have heart, lung, joint, or balance concerns, ask for a referral to:
 - Cancer rehabilitation
 - Cardio-oncology
 - Physical therapy
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Suggested Weekly Exercise Framework

Target: +10 MET-hours/week (to be adjusted based on your individual capacity and medical team's guidance)

Disclaimer: Exercise recommendations should always be individualized based on your specific cancer type, treatment history, current health status, and personal circumstances. The following framework is based on research findings but may not be appropriate for everyone.

Choose activities that suit your interests and abilities. So, **you can mix and match** activities of different MET levels as long as the total adds up to 10 MET-hours/week. Here's what reaching the weekly goal (when starting after a sedentary phase) looks like (build it up to reach the weekly target within 6 months of starting the exercise plan):

Activity	METs (approx.)	Why It Works	Weekly Target (Hours)	Daily Goal (Minutes) 5 days/week	Aligned activities (Select based on interest and ability)
					Days
Brisk Walking (4 mph)	4.3	Accessible, safe for all fitness levels, supports cardiovascular endurance	2.3	28	

Cycling (10-12 mph)	6	Great for joint health, high calorie burn, easy to control intensity	1.7	20					
Swimming (leisure pace)	6	Full-body, low impact, improves cardio-respiratory fitness	1.7	20					
Water Aerobics	5.5	Gentle on joints, builds endurance and flexibility	1.8	22					
Dancing (slow ballroom)	3.5	Fun and engaging, supports coordination and rhythm	2.9	34					
Gardening (weeding, digging)	4	Combines strength and aerobic effort, functional daily movement	2.5	30					
Tai Chi	3	Improves balance and mobility, low joint stress	3.3	40					
House Cleaning (mopping/vacuuming)	3.3	Functional movement, adds aerobic activity with purposeful tasks	3.0	36					
Elliptical Trainer (moderate effort)	5	Indoor option, smooth motion, scalable intensity	2.0	24					
Hiking (moderate trails)	6	Builds endurance, strength, and mood in a natural setting	1.7	20					
Stair Climbing (slow pace)	5	Time-efficient, engages lower body strength and cardio	2.0	24					
Doubles Tennis	5.5	Boosts agility and coordination, includes social component	1.8	22					
Yoga (Vinyasa/Flow)	4	Combines flexibility, strength, and focus	2.5	30					
Resistance Training (circuit, light weights)	3.5	Preserves muscle mass, supports metabolism and bone health	2.9	34					
Zumba or Aerobic Dance	6.5	Dynamic, fun, and community-based, boosts motivation	1.5	18					
Rowing Machine (moderate pace)	7	High aerobic benefit, strengthens upper and lower body together	1.4	17					

Monitor Your Progress Thoughtfully

At each visit, we'll check in on your progress:

- How many minutes/week you're doing.

- How close are you to reaching the 6-month goal?
- What's working - and what's getting in the way
- Whether you need more support

Remember: **progress looks different for everyone**. Some days will be better than others, and that's completely normal in cancer recovery - this isn't about being perfect. It's about staying consistent and supported.

Need Help Getting Started?

Ask us about connecting you to a certified exercise professional. These experts are trained to guide people with cancer through safe, effective programs.

The **American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)**, in collaboration with the **American Cancer Society (ACS)**, offers the **Cancer Exercise Trainer** certification. Professionals with this credential are trained to design and implement exercise programs tailored for individuals living with or beyond cancer.

Here is where you can find a credible coach or program that I can refer you to:

- [**Moving Through Cancer Directory**](#): Search over 2,300 cancer-focused exercise programs by location and type.
- [**The United States Registry of Exercise Professionals \(USREPS\)®**](#): A registry of certified personal trainers and clinical exercise professionals.
- **Livestrong at the YMCA**: A free or low-cost program available in many communities.
- **Online programs**: Many offer expert support if in-person isn't feasible.
- The "[**Moving through cancer**](#)" guide also offers more tips and resources.

We can help you find the right fit - and make a referral if needed.

Your Individual Journey Matters

While exercise research shows promising results for cancer survivors, **every cancer journey is unique**. The benefits observed in studies represent population trends, not individual guarantees. Your response to exercise may vary based on your specific cancer type, treatment history, current health, and personal circumstances.

Exercise is one valuable component of comprehensive survivorship care, working alongside medical surveillance, nutrition support, psychological care, and management of treatment effects. It's not a cure or guarantee against recurrence, but rather a tool that may help optimize your health and quality of life within your individual capabilities.

Remember: Progress looks different for everyone. Some survivors see dramatic improvements, others more modest changes. What matters is finding movement that works for you as part of your complete survivorship plan. Your healthcare team will help determine how exercise fits your specific situation and goals.

The goal isn't perfection - it's supporting your body's healing and enhancing your well-being in whatever way works best for your unique journey.