Physical Activity in Cancer Survivors

Physical activity is extremely important during all of the three stages of cancer survivorship:

**Stage 1: LIVING WITH CANCER**
Physical activity concerns begin following the new diagnosis of cancer, when an oncologist is selected to manage cancer care.

It is important to address physical activity and to improve your quality of life as you go through treatment. Exercise is safe during cancer treatment and there are many ways regular exercise may help during this stage. The following are benefits of regular exercise during cancer treatment:

- Keep or improve your physical abilities.
- Improve balance, and lower risk of falls and broken bones.
- Keep muscles from wasting due to inactivity.
- Lower the risk of heart disease.
- Lessen the risk of osteoporosis (weak bones that are likely to break).
- Improve blood flow to legs, and lower risk of blood clots.
- Make you less dependent on others to do normal activities of daily living.
- Improve your self-esteem.
- Lower the risk of anxiety and depression.
- Lessen nausea.
- Lessen symptoms of tiredness (fatigue).
- Help control your weight.
- Improve your quality of life.

Always check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

- This is especially true if your treatment can affect your lungs or heart or if you are at risk for these diseases.
- If you have low white blood cell counts, stay away from public gyms and other public places until your counts are at safe levels.
- If you feel very tired and don’t feel up to exercising, try to do 10 minutes of stretching exercises every day.
- Watch for bleeding, especially if you are taking blood thinners.
- Do not exercise if you have unrelieved pain, nausea/vomiting, or any other symptom that causes you concern and call your doctor or nurse. Also if you have a catheter avoid resistance training that uses muscles in the area of the catheter to avoid dislodging it.
- Fatigue with cancer treatment is expected, but a regular exercise program will help reduce fatigue as well as decreasing stress, which is an important part of getting well and staying well.

*continued on back*
Stage 2: LIVING THROUGH CANCER

Physical activity and exercise issues continue after the primary curative treatment ends when most cancer survivors transfer to the recovery phase of survivorship.

After you have finished your treatment, you may still have symptoms or side effects that affect your physical well-being. It will take time for them to go away. After treatment, if you haven’t started a physical activity program yet, this would be a good time to start. A program of regular physical activity will help you recover from treatment and will improve your fitness. Be sure to seek the advice of your doctor and health care team before beginning an exercise program. Tips for your exercise program might include:

- Set short-term and long-term goals.
- Focus on having fun.
- Do something different such as trying yoga, dancing, or tai chi.
- Ask for support from others or get friends, family and co-workers to exercise with you.
- Use charts to record your exercise progress.
- Recognize and reward your achievements.

Stage 3: LIVING BEYOND CANCER

Physical Activity issues continue to be addressed during long-term survivorship (the last stage) of living beyond cancer, which can be both stressful, as well as, hopeful, as cancer survivors find a “new normal.”

During this phase which is either disease-free living or living with stable disease, you still need to continue to be active. This would include the following American Cancer Society recommendations:

- Avoid being inactive and return to normal daily activities as soon as possible following diagnosis.
- Exercise at least 150 minutes per week.
- Include strength training exercises at least two days per week.
- If you were not active before diagnosis, you should start with low-intensity activities and then slowly increase your activity level. People who are older, or with bone disease, arthritis or nerve damage should use extra caution to reduce their risk of falls and injuries.

Can regular exercise reduce the risk of cancer coming back?

This question has not been looked at for all types of cancer, but there have been published studies of breast, colo-rectal, prostate, and ovarian cancers. In these studies, people with higher levels of physical activity after diagnosis lived longer and had less chance of the cancer coming back. Still, more studies are needed to see if exercise has a direct effect on cancer growth.

Additional West Texas Cancer Survivors Network- Phase 2 Fact Sheets will address strategies for

- SURVIVORSHIP CARE PLANS
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- DIET & NUTRITION
- WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

References:

1. Lifestyle Changes that Make a Difference, Nutritional and Physical Activity Guidelines for Cancer Survivors. Pamphlet from American Cancer Society. cancer.org