

## Cancer Survivorship and Exercise — A Perfect Match



Fewer than 21% of cancer survivor patients are prescribed exercise. When exercise is prescribed, comprehensive guidelines are often not provided.

Cancer survivorship should be about strength and fitness, decreasing the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, and prevention of recurrence. Survivorship issues during and after treatment can be addressed including decreased muscle strength, fatigue, and impaired physical functioning.



A physical therapist can help address survivorship issues to improve wellness. A therapist can perform a musculoskeletal evaluation to screen for muscle weakness, cancer related fatigue, balance, coordination, body weight/body composition and cognition. There are specific exercise guidelines during phases of low platelet count with chemotherapy that should be followed. Once platelet counts are stabilized, an Oncology Rehabilitation program could be initiated. A physical therapist could address post-surgical needs, and establish a safe exercise program during and post chemotherapy, and radiation.

Specialized therapy can address orthopedic pain conditions, balance and coordination, conditioning, osteoporosis, pelvic floor issues and peripheral neuropathy. Referrals to our Speech pathologists to manage speech dysfunction or swallowing problems and to our Occupational therapists for lymphedema prevention and management can be made as part of the Oncology Rehabilitative process.

Studies have shown that physical activity during a hospital stay for cancer treatment can reduce that hospital stay by 30%. Another study by Holmes et al in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Volume 293, No. 20:2479-2486) had some very promising results regarding exercise and cancer survivorship in a 10-year follow up study; 3000 woman that had been diagnosed with breast cancer throughout a 10-year time frame were studied. The women that exercised three to five hours per week had an increased cancer survivorship of 14%. This association was particularly apparent among women with hormone-responsive tumors. These results suggest a possible

hormonal mechanism for improved survival among women who are physically active. In this study, it did not matter the type of exercise performed, overall physical activity and frequency of exercise is what made the difference. Most women in this study had reported walking as their primary mode of exercise.

There are many amazing strides being made in cancer treatment each year improving survivorship and quality of life. Exercise, performed in the right doses, at the right time, with the right guidance, is a tried and true way to improve cancer survivorship. Check with your doctor to see if this type of program may be right for you.



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Andrea (Andi) graduated in 1986 from Columbia University with her Masters Degree in Physical Therapy. She has been a Board Certified Orthopedic Clinical Specialist since 1995. She has a strong orthopedic and manual therapy background and specializes in the spine, shoulder, knee, hip, ankle and TMJ. She is also a clinical instructor for Western University of Health Sciences, University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, and Columbia University. In her free time, Andrea is busy with her boys and family, pets, and gardening.