


A publication from:



ALCOA C V A A
Active Living Coalition for Older Adults / Coalition d'une vie active pour les aîné(e)s

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults

P.O. Box 143
Shelburne ON L0N 1S0
Toll Free: 1-800-549-9799
Phone: 519-925-1676
Fax: 519-925-3955
Email: alcoa3@ca.inter.net
Web: www.alcoa.ca

This brochure was developed from a review of scientific studies regarding Older Adult Cancer Survivors and exercise. For more information, and references please visit http://www.alcoa.ca/e/cancer_project/index.htm.

The Active Living Coalition for Older Adults, founded in 1999, is a charitable, not-for-profit, national organization. Its membership consists of national, provincial, local associations, and individuals that have an interest in the field of aging, and encourages older Canadians to maintain and enhance their well-being and independence through a lifestyle that embraces daily physical activities.

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Ce document est également disponible en français.

MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY A FUN AND SAFE PART OF YOUR HEALTHY LIFE

Getting active after cancer treatment

Surgery, radiation treatment, and chemotherapy can leave you feeling worn out. Once you are done with treatments, you can think about being physically active.

Getting more active can help you feel less tired. It is also a safe and fun way to improve your health and well-being. Being active helps all older healthy adults lead healthier lives, including older adult cancer survivors.

Being active lets you meet and make friends and create a healthy social routine.

Talk to your health care team and get started today!

WHY SHOULD I BE ACTIVE?

Physical activity can help you:

- feel less tired
- recover faster
- have more energy
- have better posture and balance
- manage your weight
- develop stronger muscles and bones
- relax and reduce stress
- improve your heart health

Research also suggests that physical activity may help to:

- reduce your risk of getting cancer again
- extend the life of some cancer survivors

WHAT COUNTS AS ACTIVITY?

Many people think being active means going to the gym, running laps and lifting weights. But those are not the only ways to get fit. If you like to garden, walk, ride a bike, or dance — these are just some of the activities you can make part of your healthy and active life.

You can also join an exercise class such as:

- supervised group fitness program
- walking program
- weight training program
- yoga class
- tai chi chuan class
- dragon boat racing team

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Talk to your oncologist first. They can tell you if you are ready to exercise, as well as how much, how often and how hard.

You can also talk to your family doctor, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, registered dietitian, or certified fitness professional

These people understand how physical activity can help your life. They can help you get started. They can work with you to find out what activities best meet your needs.

Fitness professionals can also prescreen you before you start an activity. Prescreening helps to determine the most appropriate physical activity for you based on your current health status.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR ACTIVITY PROGRAMS?

You may prefer to be physically active at home and walk around your community with a neighbour, or you may wish to attend a group class at your local centre. Every community offers different programs. To find out more about the programs in your community, contact your local:

- YMCA or YWCA
- community centre
- private club (health or fitness club, tennis club, lawn bowling club)
- hospital
- university



WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE SAFE FOR ME?

The most important part of being physically active is to stay safe.

You need to know what kind of exercises are safe for you to do, as some kinds of exercise or activities are not good for those who have had a certain type of cancer.

Your past treatments and your health in general affect how well you can do certain activities. When you choose an activity, remember:

- **If you have problems with your coordination or balance** (like a neurological complication), then you need to do stable exercises. This means riding a stationary bike instead of walking on a treadmill.
- **If you have a compromised immune function**, stay away from public gyms and other public places. When your white blood cell counts return to safe levels, you can go back to these places.
- **If you suffer from severe fatigue**, you may not feel well enough to join an exercise program. But you can start with stretching for a short time. You can also try Tai Chi Chuan or yoga. You can even go for short walks. **Every little bit counts!** Start at a comfortable level for you.

- **Do not exercise** when you are at risk of infection, are in pain, or experiencing other side effects that are not well-controlled (for example, on-going or repeated lymphedema (swelling), muscle weakness, or cognitive challenges).
- **If you have physical challenges** (for example arthritis or obesity) you may want to see a physical therapist or an exercise professional before you start, as there may be some physical factors that could affect your ability to take up an activity safely.
- **If you have any other medical conditions**, you may need to be in a program that can meet your needs (for example, cardiac rehabilitation programs.)
- **Talk to your doctor** before you start a 'high-intensity' exercise program (for example, dragon boat racing.)

HOW DO I KNOW I'M BEING SAFE WHEN I EXERCISE?

Being safe means:

- **Start slowly.** Increase the amount of time you exercise and the intensity as you are able.
- **Listen** to your body and don't overdo.
- **Start with shorter exercise times.** Work your way up 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Moderate activity should make you feel warm and breathe deeply.
- **Remember, you do not have to do this all at once.** Just add a few minutes at a time, when you feel ready.

HOW DO I KEEP FROM GETTING BORED?

The best way to have fun, stay safe and get fit is to choose different activities.

1. Talk to a healthcare or fitness professional before you start.
2. Choose a variety of exercises. Try something that builds:
 - **endurance** – try walking
 - **flexibility** – try reaching, bending and stretching
 - **strength** – try lifting weights, doing resistance training
 - **balance** – try yoga
3. Start slowly.
4. Make it something you like to do.
5. Wear the right clothing. Wear shoes that fit properly and are comfortable. Wear clothes that do not make you too hot or cold.

For more information, read **Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living for Older Adults**. This guide has lots of tips and helpful hints for being active. Contact 1-888-334-9769.

WHAT DO I DO IF I DON'T FEEL WELL WHEN I EXERCISE?

Listen to your body. If you are tired or your body aches, take a break.

Watch for these signs when you exercise (or after):

- being too tired
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- dizziness
- swelling
- pain

If you have any of these or any other concerns, talk to your healthcare team or fitness professional.

WHAT ARE OTHER WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY?

Keeping healthy also means:

- Choosing a healthy balanced diet
- Stopping smoking
- Keeping your weight within a healthy limit

Remember:

- **Every little bit counts.**
- **Start with a few minutes each day.**
- **Try something you like.**
- **Listen to your body and stay safe.**

Follow these simple tips and your activity time will add up fast. You will feel the benefits sooner than you think.

