

# Active Living Tips for Older Adults



Practical, leading edge research results applied to physical activity for older adults, in plain language for health practitioners and leaders.  
Sponsored by the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA).

## Physical Activity and Cancer: From Prevention to Recovery

By: Laurie Hoffman-Goetz, PhD, MPH - Department of Health Studies and Gerontology, University of Waterloo

Kerry S. Courneya, PhD - Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta

### Active Living Coalition for Older Adults

30 Delta Park Blvd.  
Brampton, ON  
L6T 5E7

Toll-free: 800 549-9799

Tel.: 905 799-8490

Fax: 905 458-7422

E-mail: [alcoa@ca.inter.net](mailto:alcoa@ca.inter.net)

[www.alcoa.ca](http://www.alcoa.ca)

*Additional copies of  
ALCOA Research  
Update issues and  
research references  
for this article are  
available in print and  
electronic formats  
from the ALCOA  
office, or can be  
downloaded from  
[www.alcoa.ca](http://www.alcoa.ca)*

*The financial support of  
Health Canada is  
gratefully acknowledged.*

Ce document est  
aussi disponible  
en français.

© ALCOA 2001

## E xercise may help to prevent some cancers

Cancer mostly strikes older adults. When people have cancer, the genes in their cells have changed which makes the cells grow out of control and then tumors develop. Why the changes occur remains an area of intense research. Despite not fully understanding how cancers develop, there are things people can do to prevent it, at any age.

Many studies show that people who exercise 3 to 4 hours a week have less chance of developing colon cancer. Physical activity may reduce risk because it speeds up digestion. This means that substances that can cause cancer move through the gut more quickly. To cut the risk of colon cancer, people need to do at least moderate exercise, such as an aqua fit class, or walking briskly.

What about breast cancer? How physical activity lowers breast cancer risk is likely very complex but it may result from changes it causes in the response of normal breast tissues to female and other hormones, its impact on overall weight

and its benefit in maintaining a healthy immune system. Older women can get the best protection if they have exercised regularly all of their lives. But exercise can also help older women who have never been physically active. Moderate physical activity can cut the risk for older women who are just starting an exercise program.



over



What you can do:

- Remind everyone you know that regular exercise may help to reduce their risk of colon cancer!
- Remind your daughters, granddaughters, nieces and female friends that being physically active may help to reduce their risk of breast cancer when they are older!

It is never too late to start exercising. If you are physically active, you will be less likely to smoke and more likely to make healthy food choices. An exercise program will help control your weight and trim any body fat, which may also help to reduce your cancer risk.

To help prevent cancer, spend at least 30 minutes a day doing moderate physical activity. Remember to follow Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults. Consult your doctor before you start any exercise program.

## **Exercise can help you recover from cancer**

People with cancer live longer than a few decades ago, but cancer treatments can be hard. They can drain you physically and emotionally. Surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy can also make it difficult for you to be active. Cancer survivors often want to know what they can do to cope with their treatments, recover after treatments, and

reduce the risk of the cancer coming back. In the past two decades, researchers have started to look at how exercise might help. There is much more to learn, but exercise may be a key to recovering from cancer.

Research has shown that when people exercise during cancer treatments, their aerobic fitness, muscular strength and physical functioning improve. Exercise can also help them feel less tired. People who find it hard to exercise during treatments can exercise when they are in recovery. Exercise can improve your physical and mental health. It can make it less likely that your cancer will return and can increase your chances of survival.

Right now, we do not know a lot about the best exercise program for older cancer survivors. We recommend that older cancer survivors follow Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults.



*Health practitioners, leaders and others: Please post, copy and distribute this article to older adults. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Health Canada or ALCOA.*