EXERCISE:
MAXIMIZING ENERGY & REDUCING FATIGUE

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness or a lack of energy that can persist for an extended period of time. It is one of the most commonly reported side effects both during and after cancer treatments and the feeling can differ from person to person.

Research shows that **consistent exercise, performed on most days, is one of the most effective approaches to increase your energy and reduce cancer-related fatigue**, both during active treatments and into survivorship. Both aerobic exercise and muscle strengthening exercises have been shown to be effective at reducing fatigue. The most important thing to do if you have fatigue is to ensure you are performing some exercise, even small amounts, on most days of the week and as much as possible try to avoid inactivity.

EXERCISE GUIDELINES

1. **Avoid Inactivity**. Return to normal daily activity levels as soon as possible

2. Perform **aerobic exercise**. Begin with **30 minutes** of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic exercise, 3 days per week (for a total of **90 minutes per week**) to help reduce common symptoms such as fatigue and anxiety, and help improve sleep

   Once you are regularly active, increase this to **150 minutes per week** of moderate- to-vigorous aerobic exercise to improve overall health

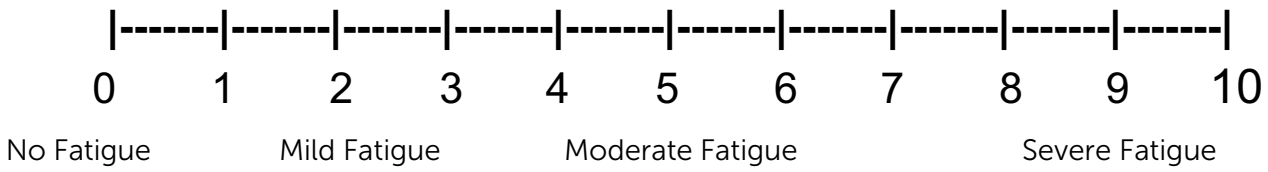
3. Perform **muscle strengthening** exercises 2+ days per week (2-3 sets of 8-15 reps)

4. Perform **stretches and balance** exercises on most days of the week

MEASURING & TRACKING FATIGUE

Measuring your fatigue level allows you to better understand your body, to know when your fatigue is at its highest and also how your fatigue and energy change over time. Your fatigue will most likely vary throughout the day, however, it is normal to have times of day where it is at its highest (e.g. afternoon). By measuring and tracking your fatigue patterns, an exercise specialist can help you to tailor your exercise plan to build energy.

One of the easiest ways to measure your fatigue is to use a visual scale from zero to ten. Zero indicates no fatigue and ten indicates the worst fatigue imaginable. Where possible, record your average and maximum fatigue levels at least once per day in a calendar (paper or electronic). In addition, recording your exercise time, intensity and other daily activities can be helpful (e.g. Average = 5/10, Max = 8/10. 9am – appointment. 1pm – Walked in park for 20 minutes at easy intensity).



HOW TO EXERCISE TO REDUCE FATIGUE

START WITH WHAT YOU CAN TOLERATE

- With fatigue present when starting an exercise program, it is important to begin with an amount that you can tolerate. You should have a **positive response to exercise**, both during and after, and should **not** experience a large increase in fatigue or an 'energy crash'
- You may need to start with as little as two to five minutes per session if you are deconditioned or if you have high fatigue levels, and then repeat this multiple times throughout your day. If you have been exercising regularly, you may tolerate 20 – 60 minutes per session, depending on what you have been doing
- Keeping **within your limits** when starting out is important. If you do experience an energy crash, reduce the exercise time or intensity for the next session

HOW TO EXERCISE TO REDUCE FATIGUE (CONTINUED...)

BE CONSISTENT

- Exercising on **most, if not all days of the week** has been shown to be able to increase your energy levels and reduce fatigue
- For most people with fatigue, it is more beneficial to do a **small amount of exercise every day**, rather than doing a large amount of exercise on only one to two days per week. Consistency is key

BUILD YOUR EXERCISE SLOWLY

- **Your body will adapt** by doing regular exercise and will build up fitness and strength over time. It may take two to six weeks to feel any improvements. If you progress your exercise too quickly, you can make your fatigue worse
- The recommended exercise progression involves increasing your total exercise time by no more than 10 to 20% each week. For, example, you can increase a daily 10-minute walk to 12-minutes for the following week
- Once you can tolerate daily exercise for at least 15-minutes per session, **start to increase the intensity of the exercise**. For example, increasing the pace you are walking at from a stroll to a brisk walk
- **Keep a record** of the time (in minutes) and intensity (effort out of 10) of your exercise sessions so that you can **track your progress**. If you have questions about this, speak to an exercise specialist

GETTING STARTED

If you are not currently active or you are irregularly active, start exercising slowly (5 to 10 minutes per session for aerobic exercise) at an intensity that you can tolerate (light to moderate aerobic exercise or light weights for strength training), and gradually build up your exercise time and exercise intensity. Building consistency is important – try to exercise every day, even if it is just for a short time. Try to record the details of your exercise (time & intensity) and how you felt afterwards (e.g. fatigue 5/10).

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EXERCISE PRECAUTIONS

1. It is recommended that you **speak to an exercise specialist with cancer exercise training** or your medical team before becoming active at a moderate intensity if you have any of the following:

- **Currently inactive** or low activity levels (<60 minutes per week)
- One or more additional **chronic health conditions** (e.g. cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure not controlled by medication, osteoporosis, diabetes)
- **Concerns** about becoming more active
- A **negative response** after trying to become more active (e.g. high fatigue levels or pain)

2. **Precautions are required** if you have advanced cancer, low hemoglobin, low white blood cell counts, low platelets, high temperature, vomiting or diarrhea, pain, recent surgery, severe fatigue, lymphedema, bone metastases, osteoporosis or peripheral neuropathy. Speak to an exercise specialist or your medical team.

3. **STOP exercising immediately and call 9-1-1** if during exercise you experience pain or pressure in your chest or arms; severe shortness of breath; dizziness or fainting; or irregular or unusually rapid heartbeat.

MORE INFORMATION

- For additional information visit the BC Cancer Exercise Support webpage bccancer.com (click Health Info → Coping with cancer → Exercise Support)
- Exercise specialists are Certified Exercise Physiologists or Physiotherapists
- **Certified Exercise Physiologists with cancer exercise training** are available at no cost by calling HealthLink BC (dial 8-1-1) and asking for "Physical Activity Services for Cancer"
- A **Physiotherapist** can be found at bcphysio.org and a **Certified Exercise Physiologist (CEP)** can be found at csep.ca. To ensure that the professional listed has cancer exercise training, search for "oncology" or "cancer" in the find-a-professional or member search section