Let’s Get Physical: The role of physical activity in cancer survivorship

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Today’s session

1. Background –
   Dr. Kristin Campbell

2. Current research –
   Dr. Prue Cormie

3. The real deal –
   Alice and Christine
The role of physical activity in cancer survivorship - Top 5 questions
1. Exercise for people with cancer?

2. Is exercise safe?

3. Will exercise reduce the risk of cancer coming back?

4. What counts as exercise?

5. How do I get started?
Question 1

Exercise? For people with cancer?
There is a drop in physical activity following diagnosis
Total Physical Activity Before & After Diagnosis in Breast Cancer Survivors

Irwin et al. Cancer 2003;97:1746-57
Physical Activity helps to:

• Reduce stress & improve mood
• Boost your energy
• Reduce some side effect like fatigue
• Improve physical fitness & strength
• Improve sleep
• Improve overall health

Canadian Cancer Society, www.cancer.ca
Trajectory: Exercise & Cancer Research

- Physiological Outcomes
  - Specific side effects
  - Optimal prescription
  - Health in Survivorship

- Psycho-social Outcomes
- Safety

1980’s  1990’s  2000’s  2010’s  Future

Implementation Guidelines
Question 2
Is exercise safe?
Research now suggests that exercise is safe for cancer survivors, during and after treatment.

But there are some exceptions...
Check with your doctor

You will need to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program. This is true even if you exercised regularly before being diagnosed. After your doctor has said it’s okay, you might also meet with a physical therapist or another healthcare professional with experience in this area. They can help you develop an exercise program that is safe, effective and fun for you.

Although exercise is safe for many people, there are some exceptions. For example, if you’re at risk for infection or anemia you may not be able to exercise. This is why you need to talk to your doctor before starting.
Safety precautions

Some general safety precautions for people with cancer include:

- Don’t exercise if you have anemia or if mineral levels in your blood, such as sodium or potassium, are not normal.

- Avoid public places, such as gyms, if you have low white blood cell counts or a weakened immune system.

- Avoid uneven surfaces or any weight-bearing exercises that could cause falls or injury.

- If you have osteoporosis, arthritis, nerve damage or cancer that has spread to the bone, do not use heavy weights or exercise that puts too much stress on the bones.

- Avoid swimming pools if you are receiving radiation therapy as chlorine can irritate skin in the treatment area.
Question 3
Will exercise reduce the risk of cancer coming back?
Research on Recurrence? Survival?

• Few studies available
• All observational
• Difficult to assess
Physical activity

Increased physical activity

Brisk Walking
30 minutes/day 7 days per week
OR
45 minutes/day 5 days per week

Meyerhardt et al. JCO 2006; 24(22) 3527-3534
Bottom Line

• Some evidence from observational studies

• More research needed
  • Cancer type, stage
  • Other factors

• Exercise lowers your risk of other chronic diseases
Question 4

What counts as exercise?
Activities “count” as exercise if:

- Causes your heart to beat a little harder
- Causes you to breath a little faster
- For at least 10 minutes blocks
What is recommended for cancer survivors?

- “Be as active as possible during treatment and recovery”
- “Try exercising when you have the most energy”
- “Some individuals may require modifications and may require greater supervision for safety.”
- “Recommendations are the same as age-appropriate guidelines for Americans.”
Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines

For Adults - 18 – 64 years

Guidelines

To achieve health benefits, adults aged 18-64 years should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

It is also beneficial to add muscle and bone strengthening activities using major muscle groups, at least 2 days per week.

More physical activity provides greater health benefits.
Moderate Intensity?

Talk Test:
• Can talk in **full sentences** without getting short of breath, you are working at a safe level.

• **Can sing** ....maybe too easy

• **Can not talk** in full sentences....too hard!

This is “moderate” physical activity
Question 5

How do I get started?
• Talk to your doctor

• Start slow. Start with something simple like walking and slowly increase how often and how long you walk.

• Try to exercise a little or do some type of activity each day, even if you are feeling unwell. Sometimes just a few minutes of gentle stretching can make you feel better.

• If you don’t have the energy to exercise for a long period of time, break it up into a few shorter sessions throughout the day.

How do I keep it up?

- Make a **plan**
- Then make a plan on how to stick to the plan
- Use goals to stay motivated
- Choose the right exercise for you
- Find and overcome your exercise roadblocks
Physical Activity Line (M-F; 9 am-5 pm)

Toll Free Number: 1-877-725-1149
Lower Mainland: 604-241-2266

http://physicalactivityline.com/

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**Who can help?**

1. “Find a Physio” link at [www.bcphysio.org](http://www.bcphysio.org) (“oncology”)

2. ACSM Certified Cancer Exercise Specialist OR ACSM Certified Exercise Specialist or Trainer (American College of Sports Medicine)

3. CSEP Certified Exercise Physiologist or CSEP Certified Personal Trainer (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology)
Take home message

• Physical activity has many health benefits

• More research needed to understand the role in reducing risk of cancer recurrence

• Some exercise is better than none

• Move more!