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How active should I be?

Being active is encouraged throughout treatment and can minimise disease and treatment related side effects and improve quality of life! It is often referred to as 'The wonder drug'. But which and how much activity should one do?

There are over 200 different types of cancer so knowing what to do for a specific cancer diagnosis can be difficult. Thankfully there are a few principles that can be applied to get moving in a safe and effective way.

What type of exercise?

Regardless of the diagnosis, the research shows to limit treatment related side effects and improve quality of life, your activity programme should include both cardiovascular and strength elements. The duration and intensity of each depends on many things, including your previous level of function and treatment but one should aim for 150 minutes of cardio activity and two strength sessions per week. The cardio should be broken down into 20-30min sessions 1-2 times per week initially and eventually building up to daily sessions. The intensity should be moderate. You should be able to have a conversation with someone when working out. For strength, focus on exercises that strengthen and improve your posture first taking 2-3 weeks to progress.

Some tips for exercising safely:

Type of cardio activity. Walking and cycling on a static bike are the best forms of cardio to do during and immediately after treatment.

Activity means moving, it does not mean going to the gym. It can be anything from gardening, walking the kids to school or doing some housework. So choose an activity that you like.

Be gentle. Your body is going through a lot so it's important not to stress it more with intense exercise. If you are feeling stiff and achy then start with some gentle stretches to get more range in your joints, then you can start doing strength.

Pain. Pain is your body's way of telling you to stop. Never go into pain, always move in a pain free range. Do a movement or activity but stop when your body starts to give you feedback such as pain.

Fatigue. >90% of people report treatment related fatigue during or after treatment. Believe it or not, exercise helps address fatigue but too much or too little can make it worse. A rule of thumb; exercise should energise you. If you feel getting fatigued during or after exercising you need to review the type, intensity or duration of exercise to ensure you are doing the correct type of level for you.

If in doubt, leave it out and seek the advice of your medical team or healthcare practitioner.

(This article is published in the My Cancer Companion App. My Cancer Companion is a free app providing the best, up-to-date and authoritative information for people with lung cancer and pleural mesothelioma).

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