



Why exercise is important for cancer patients/survivors – by Nicole Fuller

I love the saying exercise is medicine without the side effects. We all know how beneficial exercise is in general whether you have cancer or not. Let's look at the benefits.

Evidence based research has proven the benefits of exercise from a physical, mental as well as a spiritual/emotional perspective. What truly stands out for me is that exercise can help reduce the chances of developing cancer as well as to prevent a cancer recurrence.

Exercise can help prevent and manage the many treatment related side effects of the very harsh cancer treatments late and long term as a result of chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy as well as endocrine and targeted cancer treatments.

Help manage and prevent depression, anxiety and moodiness. Exercise stimulates the production of dopamine which produce feelings of happiness and pleasure. The release of serotonin a neurotransmitter accounts for euphoria and good appetite. These happiness hormones also may play a role in reducing stress levels.

Other benefits include prevention and management of osteoporosis and joint pain, improve cognitive function and memory, improve cardiac and lung function, prevent thrombotic events, improve sleep, improve immune function, wound healing and help manage blood sugar levels.

Healthy balanced eating, weight control and (BMI) body mass index for improved body image go hand in hand with exercise. A body mass index of over 25 is considered as obesity. Being obese not only increases your risk of developing cancer but can also cause a cancer recurrence as well as other lifestyle diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cardiac issues. Oestrogen is produced in fat so the risk of developing endocrine/oestrogen positive breast cancer can be significantly increased if you are overweight.

Most normal people find it difficult to start and commit to an exercise program, for cancer patients this is even more daunting. It is vitally important that you get clearance from your medical doctors before starting any form of exercise program especially if you are in active treatment or have just had surgery. It is also vitally important that you have proper guidance from exercise specialists that have experience and knowledge in dealing with cancer patients/survivors, physiotherapist's occupational therapists, cancer exercise specialists etc.

Exercise is hard work but there are so many modalities of exercise out there that can be adapted to each individual's goals needs and abilities. This is even more important for cancer patients and survivors you want to reap the benefits but you also need to be able to cope and enjoy the exercise. The recommended amount of time is 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week plus 75 min of more intense exercise per week, which equates to 30 min of exercise per day. A combination of both cardio and strength is most recommended, strength can be one's own body weight exercises or weight training. Recommended cardio is brisk walking/hiking which is very manageable for most people, running, swimming, cycling, elliptical, rowing etc. Other recommended exercises are yoga, Pilates, Zumba, dancing, NIA which is non-impact aerobics, water aerobics.