



Exercise and staying fit

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I believe that exercise is a great preventive drug, and everybody needs to take that medicine every day. Exercise strengthens the entire body from your bones, muscles to your mind. The most important thing you can do for your health is lead an active life. – Natalie

Getting regular exercise during and following your breast cancer treatment can have many benefits. It can improve your physical and emotional wellbeing and improve quality of life. Exercise can help manage treatment and cancer related side effects such as [fatigue](#), [pain](#) and [lymphoedema](#) and lowered bone density. It can also improve mood, sleep, body weight, muscle strength, confidence, depression and anxiety. There is very strong evidence that targeted exercise can also reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence.

When can I start exercising?

We recommend that you discuss starting exercise with your GP or a member of your treatment team and gain medical clearance. Generally, people can start exercising during or after treatment. In general the earlier the better however you may need to make some modifications and take precautions. You might need consider issues like compromised immunity or [lymphoedema](#) when talking to your health professional about an exercise program. The frequency and intensity of the exercises should be based on your current health and fitness.

[Find exercise programs in your area](#)

How much exercise should I do?

Research suggest that some exercise is better than none, and more is generally better than less. The Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines are produced by the Department of

Health and are the same for people with or without breast cancer. These guidelines may be something to work towards rather than your starting point.

Summary of recommendations

- Be active on most, preferable all, days of the week
- Minimise the amount of time spent in prolonged sitting
- Break up long periods of sitting as often as possible

Adults 18 - 64

- Aim for 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ - 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes (1 1/1 to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, each week.
- Try to do muscle strengthening activities on at least two days each week.

Adults 65 and over

- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.
- Try to be active every day in as many ways as possible, doing a range of physical activities that incorporate fitness, strength, balance and flexibility.

If you currently do no physical activity, start slowly and gradually build up to the recommended amount.

More details are available on the [Department of Health's Make your Move brochure](#).

What sorts of exercise are suitable?

It doesn't really matter what exercise you do, the important thing is that you do something you enjoy. This will help you to stay motivated. It can also help to alternate the types of exercise you do to keep it interesting. Activities you might like to try:

- cycling
- dancing
- dragon boating
- group sport such as netball
- gym classes, such as aerobics or step classes
- lifting light weights
- swimming or water aerobics
- walking or jogging

- yoga or Pilates.

Precautions

- You may be at increased risk of bone fracture, for example if you have low bone mineral density, are menopausal or post-menopausal, are an older woman, or have bone metastases. If you are at an increased risk of bone fracture, avoid high impact exercise and exercises where you are at an increased risk of falling.
- You may be at an increased risk of infection, for example, if you are currently undergoing chemotherapy and have a reduced cell count. If you are at an increased risk of infection check with your medical team before swimming in a public pool.

What about incidental exercise?

Incidental exercise refers to the exercise you get from regular daily activities such as housework or gardening. It can contribute to your weekly exercise total if it is done at moderate intensity.

Incidental exercises that you can include in your daily routine:

- Walking up the stairs instead of using the lift
- Walking to the shops instead of driving
- Getting off the train or bus a couple of stops early and walking the rest of the way
- Household tasks such as cleaning or gardening

Who should I see for help?

Seek professional advice from an accredited exercise physiologist (AEP) or a physiotherapist, who are trained to design individual exercise programs. AEPs are accredited health professionals who specialise in exercise programs to prevent and manage chronic diseases and injuries, including conditions such as breast cancer. You can seek an AEP through a private clinics or your hospital to help with recovery after treatment.

Search for an AEP in your area

Physiotherapists use advanced techniques and evidence-based care to assess, diagnose, treat and prevent a wide range of health conditions and movement disorders. Physiotherapy helps repair damage, reduce stiffness and pain, and increase mobility. They can address a range of needs, including treating, managing or preventing fatigue, pain, muscle and joint stiffness, and deconditioning.

Find a physiotherapist in your area

Should I be concerned about lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema, or swelling of the arm, hand or breast, sometimes develops in women whose lymph nodes were removed or damaged during breast cancer treatment. Research has shown that regular exercise can

help reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema. It can also help you to manage lymphoedema symptoms if you already have it.

You can find more information about how to reduce your risk of lymphoedema on our [lymphoedema page](#) or lymphoedema fact sheet.

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Aqua aerobics has really helped the lymphoedema in my arm. The water acts like a gentle massage. – Ann

Tips to stay motivated

- Exercise with a friend or family member.
- Tell your friends and family that you want to exercise regularly and ask them to encourage you.
- Alternate the type of exercise you do to help to keep things interesting.
- Listen to music or a podcast while exercising to keep your mind occupied.
- Include some exercise in your daily schedule -if it's in your schedule you are more likely to do it.
- Keep track of the exercise you complete in a diary.

More information

- BCNA's [My Journey online tool](#) provides more information about breast cancer and exercise.
- BCNA's *Breast Cancer and Exercise booklet* is designed to help women diagnosed with breast cancer to exercise regularly. It provides useful information on the benefits of exercise, practical tips to help you stay motivated, and an exercise diary to keep track of your achievements.

You can download the booklet [here](#) or call 1800 500 258 to order a hard copy.

- BCNA has a current list of exercise programs by state - click [here](#) to find one you might like to try.