

Physical Activity during Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy

This leaflet provides information on how to safely participate in physical activity and exercise during chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Kirkwood Hospice Support and Therapy Team: 01484 557 900 or Overgate Hospice Physiotherapy Department: 01422 379151

During cancer treatment, many people become less active because of the effects of treatment. Being active is a way you can help yourself during and after cancer treatment.

When should I begin?

It is a good idea to start as soon as possible. There are many benefits to being active prior to and during your treatment.

Research has shown that engaging in physical activity helps to manage fatigue, increase muscle strength, joint flexibility and general deconditioning caused by the cancer treatment. It also can maintain and improve the function of your heart, manage your weight and strengthen your bones. Physical activity can also help raise your mood. In some cancers physical activity has been associated with a reduced risk of the cancer spreading.

What can I do during chemotherapy or radiotherapy?

If you are currently inactive, it is recommended that you start with a small amount of low intensity activity and gradually progress to doing something most days of the week. A slow, short walk is a great way to start and you can build up the duration and intensity (e.g. walking faster or adding hills) over time.

If you are currently exercising, we recommend that you continue your activities, however, you may need to change how you are exercising if you are suffering from fatigue or are in pain. Small changes can be made to your exercise plan to allow for any side effects that you experience which are related to your treatment.

Try to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week. During these 30 minutes, make sure that your pace (your speed or movement) is of a moderate intensity. Moderate intensity means you are slightly breathless, you can hold a conversation, but you don't have enough breath to sing a song. You don't need to do 30 minutes all in one go, you can break this activity down into 5 or 10 minutes and build up gradually.

Activities may include walking, vacuuming, mowing the lawn or climbing stairs. You can also include activities like swimming, jogging, dancing, gym work outs or exercise classes. As these exercises tend to be at a more vigorous level (where you are unable to hold a conversation) you only need to do 75 minutes a week. Please also see the specific guidance below.

You should also include activities which strengthens or tones your muscles. This may include lifting weights, Pilates, using resistance bands or yoga. If you are over 65, we recommend that you do two days a week of balance and stretching exercises. If you need some ideas, see the suggested exercises on page 4.

What is safe to do?

It is rare that exercise is not recommended. More commonly, small modifications are needed to ensure that it is safe.

The following are common symptoms or conditions that normally indicate you should speak to your doctor or physiotherapist prior for advice.

- Recent surgery. While most surgeons recommend that you return to normal activities of daily living as soon as possible after a cancer surgery, restrictions can apply for up to 12 weeks for returning to exercise or weight training. Check with your surgeon to understand your activity restrictions and how long these apply for.
- Anaemia (low red blood cell count / haemoglobin) or low immune system (neutropenic).
- Unrelieved pain, nausea/vomiting, diarrhoea or any symptoms that cause you concern.

Swimming can be a good activity during treatment. However, if you have a peripheral inserted catheter (PICC) line or a Hickman central line, you cannot swim while this is in place. If you would like to continue to swim during your treatment, please speak to your doctors and nurses to discuss alternatives.

If you would like to swim during radiotherapy, reduce the number of times you swim in chlorinated water as this can have a drying effect on the skin. Make sure you have a shower after swimming to remove excess chlorine. Please discontinue swimming if your skin becomes sore. You can speak to your radiotherapist if you have any other questions about looking after your skin or using moisturisers.

If you are advised that your immune system is low (neutropenic) during your treatment, we recommend that you avoid swimming pools during that period to reduce the risk of picking up an infection.

If you have PEG feeding tube in place you can still swim as long as the area has healed and appears dry. This is generally at least 14 days from when it was inserted.

Strengthening exercises are good during treatment. On page 4 of this leaflet are a few examples of strength exercises you can do at home. However, if you have a PICC line in, we recommend that you do strength exercises under the supervision of the oncology physiotherapy team to reduce the risk of disturbing the function of the PICC line.

Will it make my fatigue worse?

Physical activity is unlikely to make your fatigue worse. In fact, it will help moderate it and even make it better. It is important to note that inactivity can lead to higher levels of fatigue, muscles wasting and reduced function, and it is recommended to try to do something physically active each day. For some, this can initially be as little as 5 – 10 minutes of walking performed multiple times throughout your day. Even small amounts of activity is beneficial, so start with something that you find easy and progress this as your body allows.

Support to be more active after a cancer diagnosis

Being active and staying active can be challenging at times. If you have any questions about doing physical activity, if you have not been active before or if you have any physical limitations due to the cancer or treatment side effects, please contact one of the physiotherapy teams using the contact details below. We can provide support through an assessment of your individual needs, access to physiotherapy lead cancer exercise classes or community exercise, goal setting and support for up to a year.

If you would like to contact us for support or advice, perhaps as your situation has changed, please contact us at the below details.

Contact us

For any advice on how to stay well and keep active at any stage in your treatment, please contact the Kirkwood Hospice Support and Therapy Team.

Kirkwood Hospice Support and Therapy Team:

01484 557 900

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

www.kirkwoodhospice.co.uk



Overgate Hospice Physiotherapy department:

01422 379151

www.overgatehospice.org.uk



Acknowledgement: Guy's and St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust

Example exercises

These exercises are examples of strength exercises. You should aim to do a selection of these exercises twice a week. Each exercise you can do for 8-12 repetitions. If you would like to progress your exercises, aim to complete 2-4 sets of each exercise.



Lunges

- Start in a standing position and use support if required.
- Take a large step forward and slowly bend your knees - try not to wobble or shake.
- Slowly return to your standing position.

To progress:

- Carry weights in each hand.



Bridging

- Lie on your back, bend your knees and cross your arms across your chest.
- Lift your bottom up and down slowly - avoid shaking.

To progress:

- With your bottom raised, lift one leg up and then slowly lower without shaking.



Stand on your toes

- Use support if required.
- Go up onto your toes.

To progress:

- Hold each lift for up to 5 seconds.
- Wear an ankle weight.



Wall push ups

- Face the wall with elbows straight and arms at shoulder height.
- Do push ups against the wall keeping your body in a straight line.



Arm curls

- Bend and straighten your arm.

To progress:

- Introduce a light weight and gradually increase.



Sit to stand

- Stand up and sit down using your hand(s) as required.
- Do as many as you can in a minute.

To progress:

- Cross your arms across your chest.



Marching

- Using support if required, march on the spot raising your knees high.

To progress:

- Wear ankle weights attached to your ankles.



Step ups

- Climb one or two stairs or a flight of stairs quickly holding onto a rail if required.

To progress:

- Increase the speed and the amount of stairs.

Useful sources of information



Kirkwood Hospice Support and Therapy Team:
01484 557 900
Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm



Overgate Physiotherapy department: 01422 379151



Macmillan Information Centre
Calderdale Royal Hospital 01422 222709
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary 01484 343 614



Cancer Team Secretary
Monday to Friday 8am – 4pm 01484 343490

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).
0800 013 0018 (PALS) patientadvice@cht.nhs.uk

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Calderdale Royal Hospital
Macmillan Unit
01422 222668

Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Greenlea Suite Ward 7
01484 342474

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce,
obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych
informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej,
prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww.
danych kontaktowych

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੂਰ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ,
ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ طرزبان میں درکار ہوں، تو
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم
المذكور أعلاه"