

## Staying active when you have cancer

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Following a diagnosis of cancer, this leaflet gives you advice, information and some basic exercises to help you stay active while you are in hospital

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A diagnosis of cancer can make you feel like your world has been turned upside down. You may not yet be sure what this means for you, and how your life will be affected.

Probably, one of the last things on your mind will be exercise – unless you were very sporty and active before your diagnosis. However, exercising and staying active is very important. Here's why:

- Both **cancer and its treatments** (eg. chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy), **weaken the muscles** that we use to move around and keep ourselves independent with daily tasks such as walking, getting washed and dressed, shopping, cooking, and doing the things we enjoy. If we don't stay active, we might begin to find it difficult to carry out these daily activities.



### Exercise is important because it:

- Helps **prepare your body** to deal with the **treatments and any side effects** that you may experience, and may help to make the side effects less severe.
- Lessens **cancer related fatigue** – research has shown that if you do a little exercise and keep active, your fatigue will actually get better and you will feel more able to keep up with your normal activities.
- Helps **prevent blood clots**, keeps your heart healthy, and improves appetite and sleep.
- **Boosts mood and self-esteem**, helps to **relieve anxiety and depression**, and promotes the feeling that you are doing something positive to help yourself.



- Helps to **maintain your muscle strength** and endurance, keeping you mobile and **independent**.

There might be times, depending on your specific diagnosis and stage of treatment, when you may need to ask your physiotherapist for advice as to what exercises are safe and appropriate, but here are a few guidelines:

- If you have bone cancer or your cancer has spread to your bones, do not lift heavy weights and avoid impact activities (running, jumping etc). Choose light weights with more repetitions (reps).
- If you are anaemic, exercise little and often instead of doing a lot in one go. If you feel light headed or faint, stop and rest.

Outside the hospital, try to keep up with general exercise such as brisk walking, using the stairs, and household activities such as vacuuming or gardening. If you normally play a sport, try to keep up with it if you can, unless you have been specifically told to avoid it.



## Exercises

The exercises listed in this leaflet are extra to keeping up with normal activities. They are safe, and designed to give you a head start with keeping active. Your physiotherapist can tailor these exercises more specifically to you if you wish.

1. **Marching on the spot** – aerobic fitness, general leg muscle strength.

You may hold on to something if you need support.

Aim for 100 steps – this can be adjusted up or down as needed. Increase the number of steps as you get fitter.



2. **Leg out to side** – strengthens muscles at the side of your hips and legs.

Stand holding onto something stable. Bring your leg out to the side and back 10 times. Repeat on the other leg.

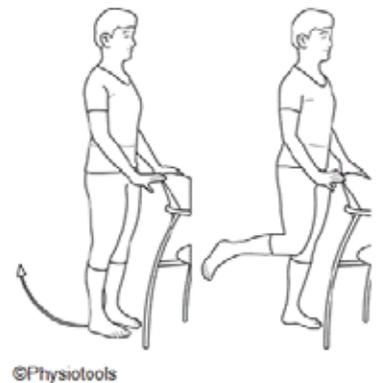
Progress this by increasing the number of times you do it (reps), or by holding the leg out for longer.



3. **Squat** – strengthens muscles in your legs and bottom.  
Stand holding onto something stable. Slowly bend your knees, keeping your bottom tucked in, and then straighten your knees. Repeat 10 times.  
You can progress this by increasing the reps, or by staying down for longer.



4. **Knee bend** – strengthens muscles at the backs of your legs.  
Stand holding onto something stable. Bend your knee, lifting your foot up behind you. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times on each leg.  
Progress this by increasing the number of seconds, or by increasing the reps.



5. **Sit to stand practice** – aerobic fitness, leg, bottom and core strength.  
From sitting, cross your hands over your chest and stand up without using your hands. Repeat 10 times.  
If necessary, you can start by using your hands and then progress to not using them as you get better at it.



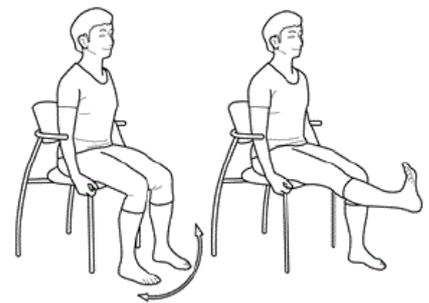
6. **Chair “push ups”** – arm and shoulder strength, plus core work.  
From sitting, push down on the arms of the chair and straighten your elbows until you lift your bottom from the chair. Repeat 10 times.  
Progress by increasing the number of reps, or by including a hold at the top.



**7. Knee straightening** – strengthens muscles at the front of your thigh.

Sitting, straighten your knee, bringing your foot up level with your hip. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times on each leg.

Progress by increasing the number of seconds held, or by increasing the reps.



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**8. Knee squeeze** – strengthens muscles on the inside of your thighs.

In sitting, place a ball, rolled up towel or your fist in between your knees. Squeeze for 15 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Progress by increasing the number of seconds held or by increasing the reps.



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If you need help or more information, ask for the physiotherapist on Adelaide Ward. The contact number is 0118 322 7472.

For further information and reading, go to [www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/maintaining-a-healthy-lifestyle/keeping-active](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/maintaining-a-healthy-lifestyle/keeping-active)

More information is available on the Trust website:  
[www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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