

# WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE WITH CANCER TO GET ACTIVE?

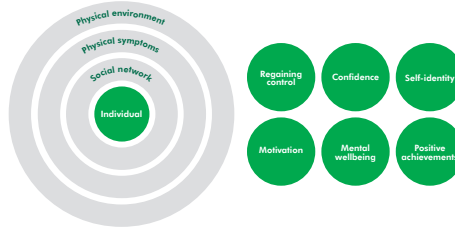
## Understanding motivators and barriers for physical activities among people living with cancer

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### Background

People with cancer are living longer following diagnosis than they did 40 years ago. Today, a cancer diagnosis increasingly means living with the illness.

Being active can help to overcome fatigue, anxiety and depression, as well as improve physical function and quality of life. In some cases, being physically active has been shown to reduce cancer's progression, mortality and recurrence. To enable people with cancer to feel the benefits of physical activity we must fully understand the barriers they face and what may motivate them to become more active. This research aimed to answer these questions.

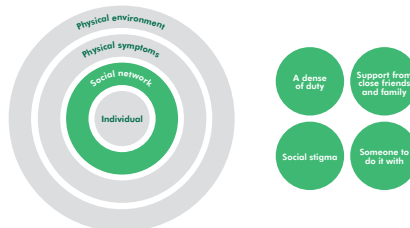


The individual drivers of physical activity behaviour in people living with and beyond cancer.

### Social network

Having a strong social network, and support from family and friends, were strong drivers of physical activity. Close family and friends tended to be encouraging of activity, as they saw it as beneficial and part of their loved one 'getting back to normal'. Having someone to do an activity with was also a strong driver.

**Our survey showed 61% of people living with and beyond cancer said that having a friend or family member to be active with would be beneficial.**

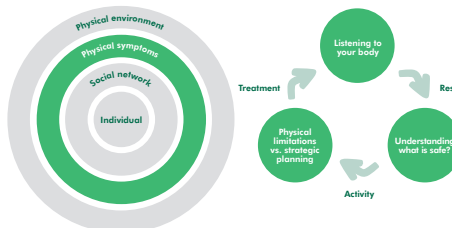


The social network of a person living with and beyond cancer can influence their physical activity behaviour.

### Physical symptoms

The physical symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatments, notably pain and fatigue, were identified as barriers to physical activity. Also prominent were incontinence (for bowel and prostate cancers), scars from surgery affecting certain muscle groups, and breathlessness (for lung cancer).

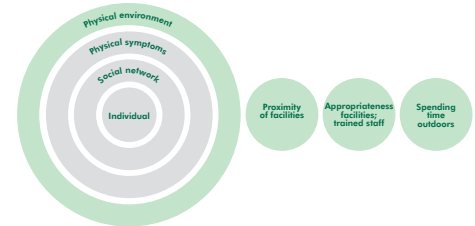
'The trouble I find is because I look so healthy people forget you aren't the same inside, health wise.'  
 Person in remission from non Hodgkin's lymphoma aged 50-59



The impact of physical symptoms of cancer and its treatments on the physical activity behaviour in people living with and beyond cancer.

### Physical environment

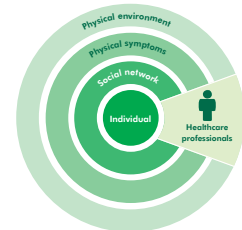
The physical environment and proximity of certain facilities can widen (if available) or narrow possibilities (if lacking). Another driver of physical activity is having access to appropriate facilities. Social stigma again plays a role, with people feeling uncomfortable in public places.



The influence of the physical environment on physical activity behaviour in people living with and beyond cancer.

### The importance of healthcare professionals

Healthcare professionals can have a strong influence on physical activity behaviour. Many participants and their family members were sceptical about the evidence of the benefits of physical activity for people living with cancer. They wanted to hear these messages from trusted healthcare professionals, gaining permission to be active. They wanted to know that it is safe and right for them and their condition.



Healthcare professionals can have a strong impact on the drivers of physical activity in people living with cancer.

'If someone said to me "Do this much exercise, but don't do too much." Or just showed me some exercises to do ... just "build yourself up" or "do a few stretches" or whatever. I think that would have been really helpful.'

Person in survivorship from melanoma aged 14-19.

### Conclusions

There are various drivers of physical activity behaviour in people living with and beyond cancer. An individual may be motivated, confident and focused on positive achievements and regaining control, with the social network in place. In this case they are likely to find ways to become active and overcome any physical symptoms or limitations in their physical environment. Another person may be unmotivated, unconfident and experiencing anxiety or depression, and not have a social network. Even with few physical symptoms and plenty of opportunities across their physical environment, they are unlikely to become active.

People living with and beyond cancer need to know that it is safe to become and stay active, at a level that is right for them. They should listen to their body, starting slowly, building gradually and planning around treatment cycles and physical limitations. These messages need to come from trusted healthcare professionals. The timing of the message is deemed less important than the person who delivers it. Messages should be delivered sensitively with useful examples and information.

### Method

The research consisted of three stages:

- Phase one** Review of 55 articles
- Phase two** 20 in-depth interviews, 10 including family and friends
- 26 mobile ethnographies: in-the-moment motivations
- 21 online discussions: self-reflection and discussion
- Phase three** Survey to 1011 people living with cancer

### Findings

#### Defining 'physical activity'

The qualitative research phase found many respondents associated 'physical activity' with more formal exercise and sport such as running and going to the gym. Once prompted to think about physical activity in the context of cancer, respondents' definition shifted to include non-formalised and lower intensity activities part of their everyday lives. These included climbing stairs, carrying out household chores, gardening, walking pets and playing with their children or grandchildren. Often these activities were not thought of as 'physical activity'.

#### Individual drivers

Individual level drivers were highly influential on behaviour. They were also a predictor of whether or not a person was physically active during and after their cancer diagnosis and treatment. Individual drivers relate to people's emotional states including their level of confidence, response to cancer, mental wellbeing and self-identity about being physically active.

Many respondents reported low confidence in their ability to engage in physical activity, their physical safety and their ability to be in public. A positive response to their cancer can mean people are determined to fight the disease and make changes. This may include adopting a healthier lifestyle including becoming more active.

### Working together



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 Digital version of this poster available from [macmillan.org.uk/barriersmotivators](http://macmillan.org.uk/barriersmotivators)

### References

- Source: Macmillan/YouGov online survey of 1,011 adults aged 18 and over with a previous cancer diagnosis. Fieldwork conducted between 10 and 17 December 2015. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the living with cancer population.

### Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by Macmillan and conducted by TNS BMRB. The quantitative survey was conducted by YouGov.

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