Physical Activity & Cancer

10 top tips

Supporting Primary Care professionals

Physical activity (PA) is known to have benefits for enabling people to live life to the fullest at all stages of their cancer journey and improve both health and quality of life including preventing and managing treatment side effects; and reducing the relative risk of recurrence and disease progression for some cancers. These tips aim to equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge, considerations and further resources to have effective conversations with patients around PA.

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1 It is widely acknowledged that physical activity (PA) is safe, effective and should be an integral part of continuous care of all individuals living with cancer. Whether this be as prehabilitation, during treatment, or rehabilitation after treatment, PA can help recovery from treatment, control fatigue, improve wellbeing and increase cardiorespiratory fitness associated with longer survivorship and reduced risk of recurrence or disease progression.

2 PA has a role to play in the prevention and management of other long-term conditions, the most common being cardiovascular disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal, and psychological disorders.

3 Support patients to gradually work up to age-appropriate levels. Remember, any amount of PA is good but benefits are greater with more PA within safe guidelines, with patients who are least active standing most to gain from even small increases.

- **Be Active:** 150 mins of moderate intensity activity (walking, gardening, swimming) or 75 mins of vigorous intensity activity (running, sport, stairs) per week.
- **Build Strength:** Twice per week including all major muscle groups. Activities: weight training, aerobics or carrying bags.
- **Improve Balance:** Twice per week. Activities: dance, Tai Chi and bowling.

4 Encourage periods of sitting or inactivity to be broken up by a few minutes of movement every hour.

5 Consider co-morbidities, previous treatment, current fitness level and patient choice when recommending PA. Macmillan's insight research shows that some people prefer group exercise, where others want to keep it individual.

6 Signpost patients to PA resources to support long-term behaviour change. Macmillan's **Move More Guide** has been shown to significantly increase PA levels over the course of 6 months. The biggest improvements were seen in those who were previously classified as inactive prior to cancer diagnosis. The campaign 'We Are Undefeatable' is another resource for patients on how to become more **physically active**

7 Cancer care reviews are an opportunity to explore the broader factors affecting a patient's wellbeing including encouraging PA. Macmillan CCR templates help prompt these conversations and include downloadable information you can share.

8 You don't need to be a PA expert to still provide helpful guidance and advice. Enhance your knowledge and skills around physical activity and behaviour change with the **CanRehab** and **Moving Medicine**.

9 For many, the Coronavirus pandemic will have reduced their accessibility and confidence in engaging with PA. Macmillan has partnered with SafeFit to provide those suspected or diagnosed with cancer support from an **exercise specialist**.

10 Consider barriers to PA and encourage the concept of 'something is better than nothing'. Goal setting using the SMART principles could be useful to promote behaviour change.

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