

CANCER SURVIVORS & THE HEALING POWER OF MOVEMENT

by Karlie Intlekofer, Ph.D.

You probably already know that exercise reduces cancer risk, but did you know that healthy movement can have a positive impact on those undergoing treatment and those recovering from cancer? As the leading global cause of death, with a lifetime risk exceeding 40%, it's likely that there are cancer survivors in your fitness facility. By understanding the challenges faced by individuals diagnosed with cancer, you can provide crucial empathetic support during their journey back to wellness.

Mental & Physical Challenges

Understandably, a cancer diagnosis is emotionally distressing. Individuals grapple with feeling a loss of control over their bodies and their lives. In fact, newly diagnosed individuals often report increased fear, anxiety, sadness, depression and loneliness. It's such a profoundly devastating experience that friends and family who provide care report experiencing mental health declines themselves during the treatment process. Some individuals will also self-isolate by choosing not to disclose their diagnosis, even to their families. This is especially true for men, who often prioritize control and self-reliance as part of their masculinity. Worst yet, all these mental health challenges are in addition to the litany of physical struggles patients endure due to surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.

SPECIFIC ADVANTAGES OF STAYING ACTIVE

Studies in cancer patients show that physical activity significantly benefits their sleep and bone health. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that regular exercise minimizes their fatigue, anxiety and depression, improving their quality of life.

Getting Started

While exercise may be restricted in some situations, particularly after surgical procedures and in those with severe heart disease, experts agree that inactivity should be avoided for the majority of cancer patients during treatment and recovery. Yet how do you convince people who have already been through so much to take on the challenge of exercising again? Start by reminding them that research confirms that exercise benefits mental and physical resilience in cancer patients. Let them know that research also confirms better surgical outcomes in patients who prioritize exercise.

10 MINUTES OF INDOOR CYCLING INCREASED CIRCULATING IMMUNE CELLS, INCLUDING THOSE THAT FIGHT CANCER.

PRIVACY REMINDER

Discussions about a member's health status are deeply personal and should never be shared without explicit permission.

CERTIFICATION OPTIONS

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) offers a Cancer Exercise Specialist Course

The CanRehab Cancer Confidence Course in the United Kingdom

The Cancer Exercise Training Institute (CETI) offers a Cancer Exercise Specialist Course

Thrive Health offers a Cancer & Exercise Certification

Workout Duration

While exercise recommendations for cancer patients are for 30 to 60 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per day, immune benefits are also realized in shorter bouts of exercise. For example, in lymphoma and breast cancer patients, a mere 10 minutes of indoor cycling increased circulating immune cells, including those that fight cancer. Daily workouts offer the best immune responses, ensuring that the increase in circulating immune cells is sustained for multiple days. This supports other studies in cancer patients that show regular exercise offers the best immune response against cancer.

Hope & Healing

Individuals fighting cancer need support that addresses both their physical and mental health challenges. Fitness professionals like you can be a vital part of their support system by offering a mix of empathy and educational insight. By helping them understand the benefits of exercise, you can make a difference in the lives of those battling cancer and in the lives of their caregivers, fostering hope and resilience for everyone.

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Dr. Karlie Intlekofer is a neuroscientist who focuses on the benefits of exercise for brain health and well-being. She has a background in research and teaching at the university level and focuses on exercise motivation and brain areas involved in stress, learning and memory. Her passion in this field is bolstered by experience working with a wide range of ages and abilities as a personal trainer and group exercise instructor. As the Global Wellness Researcher at Matrix Fitness, Karlie integrates evidence-based practices into exercise programming and develops initiatives that support an enduring habit of physical activity.