

Exercise

There is more information on bladder cancer and its treatment on our website at actionbladdercanceruk.org

Exercising regularly, eating healthily, drinking less alcohol and not smoking are the essentials of a healthy lifestyle. If you have been diagnosed with bladder cancer, now is a good time to think about whether you can make some changes. Improving your fitness and general health before you have treatment and/or surgery is likely to help you recover better from the effects. It can also give you a positive focus.

Benefits

In years gone by, the idea of exercising with cancer or while receiving treatment would seem completely wrong. But research has shown that exercise can help with the unwanted effects of cancer treatment, such as nausea, fatigue, pain and constipation. It can also help overcome some of the problems that accompany long periods spent lying down, such as stiff joints and weak muscles. And it has benefits for anxiety and low mood.

If you've finished treatment, taking regular exercise is one of the positive ways to help reduce the risks of cancer returning. It also reduces the chances of developing other health problems, such as heart disease or stroke.

In hospital

If you can, sit out of your bed and go for short walks. This can help your breathing, digestion and core strength. Ask your medical team about advice on starting to exercise following surgery or treatment.

When you're at home

How much exercise you do will be a personal matter. Do as much as you can so the muscles work, but don't overtire or stress yourself. Exercise has the same health benefits that it has for people without cancer (see Box ①), but it may also help you regain your strength and mobility and cope with unwanted treatment effects.

Staying active

At first, you may want to try to include 30 minutes of activity in your day. It doesn't have to be all at once – climbing stairs, gentle housework or gardening, or walking all count. The aim is that you get very slightly breathless.

Benefits of exercise

- Improves balance, reducing risk of falls and fractures
- Prevents muscle wasting caused by inactivity
- Less likely to develop heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis and type 2 diabetes
- Improves blood flow to legs and reduces risk of blood clots
- Improves self-esteem
- Reduces anxiety and depression
- Decreases nausea
- Increases social contact
- Reduces fatigue
- Helps control weight



Becoming fitter

Whether you were fit before your diagnosis or treatment, or you've decided to make a positive change now, be prepared to build your fitness gradually (see Box ②). If you haven't exercised for a while, start with two or three 10-minute sessions a week and build from there.

Building fitness

- As well as being active every day, introduce a regular fitness session
- This should include 10 minutes of warm up, 20 to 30 minutes of exercise and 10 minutes of cool down
- Aim to build up to a session on 3 to 5 days every week
- Aim to get warm and breathless, but don't exercise so hard that you don't enjoy it, feel dizzy or it hurts



Swimming is great exercise as you're supported in the water and can swim as quickly or as slowly as you like. It helps with mobility and it's good cardiovascular exercise too if you go fast enough to get breathless.

Swimming isn't recommended during radiotherapy or chemotherapy treatment. Talk to your medical team about when you could get back in the water.

Running You can get back to running or start from scratch with a beginners' plan as soon as you feel able (your local running group may offer a beginners' course). Take it easy, though, even if you were a good runner before your diagnosis. Your core muscles are likely to have weakened, and this will make you more prone to injury.

Yoga and Pilates are brilliant for building strength and flexibility. If you've had surgery or you have a stoma, speak to the instructor before the class. He or she will adapt some of the exercises for you.

Cycling is another form of exercise that can be done at your own pace. If you've had surgery involving the perineum, or if things just feel uncomfortable, wait till the wound is completely healed and you can sit on a saddle without it feeling uncomfortable.

Sports and martial arts You can return to your sport as soon as you feel able. If you've had surgery, talk to your medical team about the timing.

Gym and classes If you've had surgery, make sure you're fully recovered before you get back to weight-based training. If you're getting back to the gym or you've decided to start, don't get carried away. Start with light weights. You may be able to speak to a trainer for advice. If you're attending classes, you might want to have a word with the instructor before the class so they can advise you about adapting exercises.

If you've had surgery or have a stoma see if you can find a trainer or physiotherapist to put together a programme for you. If you feel any pain or discomfort around your scar or stoma, stop straightaway.

Exercising with a stoma

Swimming You can carry on, or start, swimming if you have a stoma. The adhesive on bags works in water, and you can get extenders and tape that help keep the bag secure. Speak to your stoma nurse or specialist nurse if you don't know what these are. You can buy swimwear designed for people with stoma bags (see end).

Other exercise If you are concerned about your bag during exercise, you may find extenders or tape help, especially if you get quite sweaty (speak to your stoma nurse or specialist nurse). Take spare supplies with you, just in case of an emergency.

Sports and martial arts Take care to avoid injuries to your stoma, either from contact or from being hit with a ball. You can wear a 'stoma protector' that fits over your appliance when you're playing and training.

Building fitness

- Muscle weakness or fatigue that's unusual for you
- An irregular pulse
- Leg pains or cramps
- Chest pain
- Feeling sick or are sick
- Vomiting within previous 36 hours
- Dizziness and/or blurred vision
- Difficulty breathing
- Numbness in your hands or feet



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DON'T exercise if...

Don't exercise if you've had intravenous chemotherapy in the last 24 hours.

Don't exercise if you have low blood counts (platelets, white and red blood cells).

If you have any of the symptoms listed in Box 3, don't start a session or stop if you're part way through.

More information



As well as information about bladder cancer and treatments, our website has other information sheets that you might find helpful, including sheets about other aspects of healthy living.

Your medical team should advise you about exercises if you've had surgery. Talk to them if you have any problems while exercising.

You can also search for 'abdominal surgery' and 'exercises' – many of the large hospitals or NHS trusts produce their own patient information with exercises and advice. Avoid sites from unfamiliar groups or individuals.

Other charities have information on exercise that may be helpful, too.

- **Colostomy UK** has information about exercising with a stoma and links to specialist clothes suppliers www.colostomyuk.org
- **Cancer Research UK** at <http://about-cancer.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/physically/exercise-guidelines>
- **Macmillan Cancer Support** at www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/maintaining-a-healthy-lifestyle/keeping-active