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Web Exclusive: When Survivors Should Exercise Caution

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Some survivors may emerge from their cancer diagnosis and treatment with a renewed desire to exercise in the hope of preventing recurrence. And while some studies show that exercise may prevent recurrence of certain cancers, such as breast and colon, physical activity can pose challenges for some patients.

In 2003 the American Cancer Society released the report, “Nutrition and Physical Activity During and After Cancer Treatment: An American Cancer Society Guide for Informed Choices,” that recommends for the general population at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week to reduce the risk for cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. And while specific levels of activity have not been determined for survivors, the ACS does say in the report that any movement is beneficial.

However, the report warns cancer survivors with certain conditions to take special precautions in exercising. These situations include:

- > Severe anemia: Delay exercise, other than activities of daily living, until the anemia is improved.
- > Compromised immune function: Avoid public gyms and other public places until white blood cell counts return to safe levels.
- > Stem cell transplantation: Avoid exposure to public places that are at risk for microbial contamination, such as gyms, for one year after transplantation.
- > Severe fatigue: Until the person feels up to an exercise program, they can do 10 minutes of stretching exercises daily.
- > Radiation therapy: Patients receiving radiation should avoid exposing irradiated skin to chlorine (at swimming pools, for example).
- > Indwelling catheters: Avoid pools, hot tubs, lakes, and other water with microbial exposure that may result in infections. Also avoid resistance training of muscles in the area of the catheter to avoid dislodgment.
- > Peripheral neuropathy: Nerve damage can limit a survivor’s ability to perform exercises that use the affected limbs because of weakness or loss of balance. They may do better with a stationary reclining bicycle, for example, than walking outdoors.

Read the full ACS report at caonline.amcancersoc.org/cgi/content/full/53/5/268

or call 800-227-2345.