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# Take It Easy

BY LENA HUANG

Cancer treatment is often strenuous on the body. Surgery, drug therapy, and radiation can cause short- and long-term physical side effects. For those patients, exercise may be overwhelming or even impossible, yet other options may exist.

“People with cancer who have specific mobility or functional problems, like a leg amputation or hip problems because of cancer that has spread [to the bone], are generally advised to follow the exercise programs and precautions developed for others with similar problems,” says Lillian M. Nail, PhD, RN, professor and senior scientist in oncology nursing at the Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing and a four-time cancer survivor who has conducted research on physical activity in cancer survivors.

While a patient with bone metastases to the hip may be advised to limit weight-bearing exercises because of increased injury risk, Nail suggests looking at other options, such as seated exercise programs or swimming programs developed for people with arthritis or other mobility issues, in order to keep fit. Some other general suggestions from Nail include:

> **If platelet counts are low**, avoid situations where you might get scratched, bitten by insects, fall, or have pressure put on your body because of the risk of bleeding or bruising.

> **Patients with low white blood cell counts** or an otherwise compromised immune system should avoid possible sources of infection, such as crowded places, areas where molds may grow, or people with a contagious infection.

> **Exercise in a safe situation** where you can get help if you need it.

> **Check with your care provider** to see if you have any specific exercise limitations. Monitor your symptoms when you exercise and share any changes with your care provider. Start slowly and stop if you have discomfort or pain.

Patients should always discuss exercise with their physicians, but other resources, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, and exercise physiologists, can provide guidance in developing exercise plans that fit a patient’s specific phase of treatment. Nail suggests cancer patients with comorbidities, such as heart disease, look for additional exercise advice through cardiac or pulmonary rehabilitation programs.

“People with cancer have an increasing number of resources available to them as the exercise and sports science community has become aware of the need for developing exercise programs for people with cancer, and as research has shown

the positive impact of exercise for people with cancer,” says Nail.