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# Creating a Dragon Boat Team

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After Beverly Booth heard about the Abreast In A Boat team after her breast cancer diagnosis in 1999, the survivor from Atlanta wanted to start her own team. She set up an interest meeting and e-mailed participants from a recent breast cancer walk. Only five women attended the first meeting, but Booth wasn't discouraged.

"I just hoped someone would show!" Booth says, but those five members quickly grew into a team. The 2004 annual Atlanta Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival was the team's first chance to race against other teams. After coming in second during the first race, Booth and her teammates won the final heat of the day.

"Words can't explain it," says Booth, who serves as the team's coach and drummer. "I'm sitting in front of the boat facing the paddlers and there are tears streaming down their faces. It was just amazing." Now in its eleventh year, the Atlanta festival has created a cancer survivor category because of the popularity of the sport with survivors.

Cancer survivors can easily start their own dragon boat team with the following advice:

### **1. Recruit Members**

Strategies for finding members include support groups, charity events, fitness centers and through oncologists and rehabilitation specialists. A full dragon boat crew needs 18 to 20 paddlers, a drummer and a steersperson. The drummer should have a loud voice to be able to coach and motivate the team. The steersperson should have good upper-body strength to guide the boat.

### **2. Train**

While being athletic isn't a prerequisite for dragon boating, it's a good idea to have some cardiovascular workouts and strength training before stepping into a dragon boat. Dragon boat paddling is very strenuous exercise so talk to your doctor before beginning any workout program.

### **3. Schedule Practices**

Some teams practice a couple times a week; some teams practice a couple times a month. If you're not practicing regularly each week, team members should commit to doing cardiovascular and strength exercises two or more times a week between practices.

### **4. Costs**

Dragon boat racing can be expensive, considering equipment, travel expenses and registration fees for competitions. Most teams pay a membership fee to a recreational club to use its equipment. Teams have solicited corporate sponsorships, borrowed equipment and partnered with other teams to lower costs. Raising money for a dragon boat team can also be a powerful way to raise awareness about your mission. It may be worth making the team into a nonprofit organization, which many teams have done.

## **5. Compete**

For competitions, all of the equipment is usually provided for by the hosts, so the only travel arrangements that need to be made are for team members. Many teams use festival competitions to raise awareness about breast cancer. Although survivor teams don't always win their races, they always get a huge reaction from spectators.

## **6. Raise Awareness**

Most dragon boat racing teams made up of breast cancer survivors are hard to miss during festival competitions. Many are dressed head to toe in pink and aren't shy about their mission—to raise awareness about breast cancer and life after a breast cancer diagnosis. Survivorship teams of other cancers are also popping up to stay fit and raise awareness of other cancers and survivorship issues. There are now dragon boat festivals solely dedicated to cancer awareness, including the Gorman Cup in Oregon and the Fox Chase Dragon Boat Connection in Philadelphia.