The Role of Physical Activity

This leaflet aims to provide you with some information about the importance of physical activity and ways of increasing your activity levels. In the past, adults with cancer were often told to rest during treatment. However, we now know that being active will help you manage some of the side effects of cancer and/or its treatment(s).

There are lots of benefits to keeping active during and after cancer treatment, both for your body and your mind. Activity can help reduce fatigue, increase your appetite, build muscle and bone strength, help your heart, keep you fit and help you maintain a healthy weight. Activity can also help you manage stress, anxiety and low mood. There is some evidence that for some people being active can reduce the risk of cancer coming back in the future.

However, the thought of becoming active can be overwhelming, particularly if you have not been active before or for some time. It can be difficult to know where to start or you may worry about your ability to return to your previous activity levels.
How Much Activity Should I Do?

It can be difficult to know how much and the type of activity you should be doing. It is suggested that all adults should try and do:

150 minutes (2 hours 30 minutes) of moderate intensity activity every week.

This may sound like a lot; but the activity does not have to be done all at the same time. For example:

30 minutes of activity - 5 times per week.

If you are just starting to increase your activity levels or are having treatment, you may want to do shorter times and do them over the day. For example:

Three 10 minute sessions in one day

It can also be hard to know how intense your activity levels need to be. As a rule, moderate intensity activity should make you feel a little warmer, make your heart beat a little quicker and breathing a little faster, but you should still be able to hold a conversation.
Top Tips for Getting Active and Staying Active

There are many ways that you can become more active. Here are some ideas on how to be more active:

1. **Try not to sit and lie down for a long time in the day** - do small amounts of activity throughout the day.

2. **Build activity into things you do every day,** for example:
   - Do some housework.
   - Take the stairs rather than the lift.
   - Get off the bus a stop early and walk the rest of the journey home.
   - Play with your children, grandchildren or the dog.
   - Do some gardening.

Remember that these things count towards our daily amount of activity and can help our health in the same way as swimming, running and cycling. Can you think of other ways of building activity into your daily routine?

3. **Make goals that you can achieve.** If you have never run before or for a long time, start by running for five minutes, not trying to run a marathon. As the activity gets easier, set a new goal.
4. **Write down when you do an activity in a diary.** This will help you to remain motivated and see what you have achieved.

5. **Gradually build up your activity levels.** Start with small amounts of activity, slowly increasing it over days and weeks.

6. **Do something that you enjoy.** You are more likely to stick to your activity plan and achieve your goals if you do an activity that you enjoy.

7. **Trying a new activity or changing your activities** will help to keep your interest and enjoyment.

8. **Don’t be hard on yourself if you are having a bad day,** or if you are not going as quickly as you would like. Reward yourself when you achieve your goal.

9. **You don’t have to do it alone** – asking family or friends to do some activities with you can help to keep you motivated. You may also want to think about joining a sports club or group.
10. Remember that you can ask for advice from your key-worker or GP. The National Exercise Referral Scheme can help you make an activity plan that works for you. They are at your local leisure centre. Speak to your GP, specialist nurse or key-worker if you are interested in being referred.
**Sources of Support**

The following services can give you more information or help on staying active:

- Let’s Walk Cymru 02920 646890 or [www.ramblers.org.uk/letswalkcymru](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/letswalkcymru)

- National Exercise Referral Scheme - [www.wlga.gov.uk/ners](http://www.wlga.gov.uk/ners)

- Leigh Bodilly, Velindre Patient and Carer Information and Support Co-ordinator: For information on support services in your local area – 029 20196132.

- Macmillan Cancer Support: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) or 0808 808 00 00. For further physical activity information and resources – please visit [www.macmillan.org.uk/movemore](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/movemore)
This leaflet was written by health professionals. The information contained in this leaflet is evidence based. It has been approved by doctors, nurses and patients. It is reviewed and updated every 2 years.

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