

# PRESCRIPTION

for health



## OTHER TYPES OF EXERCISE

Aerobic and resistance exercise are the primary forms of exercise. Other activities such as Tai Chi, yoga, and Pilates also help with balance, flexibility, and relaxation. Research has long shown the benefits of yoga for low back pain and high blood pressure. Seek guidance from a trained professional in an accredited group before starting.

Flexibility, either as part of Tai Chi, yoga, or Pilates or on its own, is important. Each day you exercise, take an extra 10 minutes to stretch the major muscle and tendon groups. Each stretch should last 10 to 30 seconds and be repeated 3 to 4 times. Design your exercise program for the most benefit and the fewest risks to your health or physical condition. It is important to find an activity that is both enjoyable and sustainable. Start gently. Remember to rest and recover between sessions.



## ABOUT US

The *Commit to Fit!* Prescription for Health Program is an evidence-based, best practice program that is designed to increase the practice of disease-specific physical activity and support linkages to community-based fitness and nutrition.

*Commit to Fit!* is a community-wide health behavior improvement initiative designed to promote the practice of healthy lifestyles in Genesee County by utilizing a common message and strategy that engages all residents. To facilitate improved health behaviors throughout the year, *Commit to Fit!* offers community-based classes as well as annual community-wide challenges centered around physical activity, nutrition, and overall wellness. *Commit to Fit!* is free to all those who live, learn, work, and play in Flint & Genesee County.



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*Commit to Fit! Prescription for Health materials adapted from the Exercise is Medicine Program (ACSM).*

Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US. More than 500,000 people die of cancer each year. About 10 million Americans live with a history of cancer.

## WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT FOR PATIENTS WITH CANCER?

Cancer affects people of all ages but especially older adults. 76 percent of all cancers are diagnosed in people aged 55 years and older. That means many will also have other chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or type 2 diabetes. This is common when people gain weight and/or become obese as a side effect of radiation, hormone, or chemotherapy. Exercise is critical for long term health. Strong evidence suggests that regular exercise can prevent colon, prostate, and breast cancer. Exercise is also safe during and after cancer treatment. Studies show that regular exercise during cancer therapy has many benefits including: less fatigue, less anxiety, and less severe side effects from therapy.

Exercise also helps with body satisfaction, weight control, mood, and quality of life. For example, several studies show that even 10 minutes of exercise results in less fatigue for people with cancer. The same is true for people who exercise every other day. In other words, even after a cancer diagnosis, you should be active and exercise regularly. That is, as long as exercise does not worsen your symptoms or side effects. Evidence does show that exercise is safe and effective for cancer survivors.

## GETTING STARTED

- Talk with your oncologist or surgeon about adding regular exercise to your treatment plan. Ask about any changes to your medications. Also, bring up concerns about becoming more active.
- Take all medicines prescribed by your physician.
- Start slowly. Over time, increase how hard and how long you exercise. In fact, consider increasing the time of your activity up to about 20 minutes or more. Then, start to push harder.
- Take frequent breaks as needed.
- There is no optimal exercise program for people with cancer. The goal is to preserve and possibly improve function. Be prepared to modify your activity as needed. Let your current condition and reactions to changes in treatment guide you.
- Ask your healthcare team to help you manage the side effects of treatment. Controlling nausea, vomiting, and pain will allow you to exercise more comfortably.
- Start by exercising on your own. Begin walking or another form of activity that you can add to your daily routine.
- Invite others to join you. Exercising together is more fun and increases the chance you will continue. Dogs make great walking partners!
- Use a journal to record your activity. Note the type, intensity, and time of your exercise. Then, write down any symptoms you experienced before or after. This will help you to plan for your next exercise session.
- Visit [commit2fit.com](http://commit2fit.com) for free exercise and nutrition programs in Flint & Genesee County.
- You may be eligible for a free wearable fitness tracker! Contact [commit2fit@flint.org](mailto:commit2fit@flint.org) or (810) 232-2228.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXERCISING WITH CANCER

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) suggests following guidelines for otherwise healthy people, with modifications as needed. During cancer treatment, the goal of exercise is to maintain strength, endurance, and function. After treatment, the goal is to return to your former levels of physical and psychological function. Aerobic exercise will help with fatigue. Muscle strengthening or resistance exercise can help with muscle loss. That affects about 50 percent of people with cancer.

### AEROBIC EXERCISE PROGRAMS

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity aerobic activity, 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, or an equivalent combination of both for adults. They also suggest muscle strengthening twice a week.

## Follow the **FITT** Principle to Design and Implement a Safe, Effective, and Enjoyable Program!

**F**requency – Be active on most days of the week but at least 3 to 5 days. Adapt your routine based on acute symptoms and fatigue.

**I**ntensity – Exercise at a moderate level. Use the “talk test” to help you monitor. For example, even though you may notice a slight rise in your heart rate and breathing, you should be able to carry on a conversation while walking at a moderate pace. As you walk faster, you will begin to breathe faster and have difficulty talking. At that point, you’ve achieved moderate intensity or “somewhat hard” level of physical activity. Vigorous exercise causes a large rise in heart rate and breathing. At this intensity it would become difficult to talk. Most people would rate this as “hard to very hard” level of physical activity.

**T**ime – Exercise 20 to 60 minutes per day. You can do it all at once or break it up into a few sessions of at least 10 minutes each. During active cancer treatment, a few short sessions of exercise are better than one long session.

**T**ype – Do rhythmic, weight-bearing exercises using the large muscle groups. Walking and cycling are good options. Choose activities you enjoy and will do regularly in your new, more active lifestyle. Add variety depending on the day or the season to keep your program more enjoyable.



### AEROBIC EXERCISE CAUTIONS

- Rest is a key part of your exercise program. You should rest after each session as needed.
- If you have been inactive for a long time, start with shorter sessions (10 to 15 minutes). Add 5 minutes to each session, increasing every 2 to 4 weeks. Over time, build up to being active at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week.
- Some medicine may affect your heart rate during exercise. Exercise at a level you feel is “somewhat hard.” What feels “somewhat hard” may vary from one day to the next based on your fatigue or pain. Let your body guide you. The important thing is to be active on a regular basis.
- Put off exercise if you have a fever, a risk of bleeding, anemia, abnormal blood counts, extreme fatigue, or extreme pain.
- If you are having radiation therapy, sweat may irritate your skin due to skin breakdown. Choose workout clothes that will pull away moisture. Try to keep your skin dry to avoid irritation.

### RESISTANCE EXERCISE PROGRAMS

Moderate to vigorous intensity resistance training is necessary to improve or maintain muscle and bone. Resistance training also improves your ability to function and promotes good health.

## Follow the **FITT** Principle When Creating a Resistance Exercise Program, Too!

**F**requency – Do resistance training at least 2 to 3 days per week. Plan a day of rest between sessions.

**I**ntensity – Moderate (10 to 15 repetitions). Start out with a weight you can lift 10 to 15 times but lift it only 3 to 5 times. Gradually build up to 10 to 15 repetitions.

**T**ime – 1 to 3 sets using all major muscle groups.

**T**ype – At first, use machine weights. They will help with balance problems. As your strength and balance improve, add free weights.

Don’t belong to a gym or health club? No problem. You can do the same exercises at home using free weights or resistance bands. You also can use your body as the resistance with push-ups and sit-ups. Also, view free fitness classes in your community at [commit2fit.com](http://commit2fit.com).



### RESISTANCE EXERCISE CAUTIONS

- Some muscle stiffness and soreness is normal in the beginning.
- Avoid holding your breath when lifting. This can cause large changes in blood pressure. That change may increase the risk of passing out or developing abnormal heart rhythms. This is especially true if you also have high blood pressure.
- Surgery, therapy, or other treatments may limit your activity due to muscle weakness or pain. For example, women who have had a mastectomy or lumpectomy may have limited strength and range of motion in their chest, arms, and shoulders.