

Exercise is a medicine! - patient information leaflet

The benefits

A varied exercise plan can significantly improve your health. Regular exercise improves your cardiovascular health and reduces the risks of weight gain, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and stroke. It also significantly improves tiredness, depression, insomnia, mobility and recovery from surgery or radiation therapy.

Some cancer medicines can affect heart health so maintaining an exercise plan helps you to minimize these effects. Your energy levels will increase, muscle strength will improve, and balance and coordination will be enhanced, so that you can more fully enjoy the activities of daily living.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include simple stretches, range-of-motion activities and beginning the activity at a low intensity. They can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool down to ensure your heart rate and breathing return to normal safely. Cool-down exercises include simple stretches and slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity. You should feel relaxed but energized after exercise!

Exercises to do

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. If walking is difficult, cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises are also excellent choices.

Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors.

A balanced exercise program should include cardiovascular exercises, balance exercises, stretching and strength work.

Cardiovascular/stamina exercises – to get your heart rate up!

How often:	Aim for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, or 150 minutes a week in total. If you are new to exercise, start with 2–3 days a week and add additional sessions as your strength and stamina increase.
How hard:	Low to moderate intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Aim for at least 30–60 minutes. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.
Type:	Try walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, gardening, swimming, step aerobics, spinning, roller skating, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as football, tennis, cricket and volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, vacuuming and washing the car are also good cardiovascular activities.

Benefits - regular cardiovascular exercise helps reduce the risk of heart disease, obesity, stroke, diabetes and many other long-term diseases. It also significantly prevents cancer, improves survival, reduces symptoms and the side effects of treatments, and improves your overall health and wellbeing.

Strength exercises - use your muscles!

How often:	Twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light weights or resistance exercises.
How many:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
Type:	A variety of strength and resistance exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a tin of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. Exercises may need to be modified if you have had surgery or treatments that have caused muscle weakness or limited your range of movement.

Benefits - Strength exercises help you maintain and improve your ability to do everyday tasks comfortably and without feeling tired. They also help you maintain bone, muscle and joint health while improving your strength, balance and posture.

Flexibility exercises - stretch!

How often:	Twice a week.
How many:	Try 8–10 stretch exercises using the upper and lower body.
How long:	Hold each stretch for 10–30 seconds.
Type:	Try swimming, dancing, yoga, Tai Chi, gardening or a variety of home stretch exercises.

Benefits - Regular gentle stretching improves muscle tone and the range of movement of the joints. It's also great for helping you to feel relaxed but energised, particularly when combined with breathing exercises.

Balance exercises - move with confidence!

How often:	Twice a week.
How many:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise twice.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10 seconds.
Type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, some types of martial art or simple home balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up using a chair, against a wall or sitting down. Ensure the area you are exercising in and the type of balance exercise is safe.

Benefits - Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to impending balance loss, thereby reducing the risk of falls, fractures and injuries. They also improve your posture.

Important points:

- Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.
- Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.
- Listen to your body: if you experience new symptoms then STOP and consult your doctor.
- Some exercise may need to be modified for your medical issues. For further information discuss your exercise regime with your doctor or a qualified exercise therapist before you commence it.
- If you feel tired then reduce the amount of exercise that you are doing.
- Exercise is an excellent medicine but you must still take the medications prescribed by your doctor.
- Combine your exercise with healthy living:
 - Stop smoking
 - Reduce your alcohol intake
 - Healthy eating