



Te Mate Pukupuku o nga U

Moving forward after treatment for Breast Cancer

**“Kia ora! Hau ora! Mauri ora!”
Be well, be healthy, be invigorated!**

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The role of physical activity in reducing the risk of breast cancer recurrence is less well-defined, although several recent studies suggest that breast cancer survivors who are physically active may have lower rates of recurrence and death than those who are inactive.

“Live your life, love it, laugh at it and listen to it. You are a gem and a treasure that has the strength to weather the toughest of life’s storms. Believe in you.”

Notes

[illegible]

personal needs feel physically and emotionally energised and can cope better.

Physical therapy can help you maintain strength and range of motion in your muscles, which can help fight fatigue and the sense of depression that sometimes comes with feeling so tired.

Any program of physical activity should fit your own situation. An older person who has never exercised will not be able to take on the same amount of exercise as a 20 year old who plays tennis three times a week. If you haven't exercised in a few years but can still get around, you may want to think about taking short walks.

Talk with your health care team before starting, and get their opinion about your exercise plans. Then, try to get an exercise buddy so that you're not doing it alone. Having family or friends involved when starting a new exercise program can give you that extra boost of support to keep you going when the push just isn't there.

If you are very tired, though, you will need to balance activity with rest. It is okay to rest when you need to. It is really hard for some people to allow themselves to do that when they are used to working all day or taking care of a household. Exercise can improve your physical and emotional health by:

- improving your cardiovascular (heart and circulation) fitness
- strengthening your muscles
- reducing fatigue
- improving sleep
- lowering anxiety and depression
- making you feel generally happier
- helping you feel better about yourself.

We know that exercise plays a role in reducing the risk of some cancers. Women should take part in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes for five or more days of the week. Moderate activities are those that take about as much effort as a brisk walk. Vigorous activities use larger muscle groups, make you sweat, and cause a noticeable increase in heart rate and breathing.

Congratulations, you have done everything you can to be a survivor!

A follow-up plan has been put in place for you, so you can start moving beyond your cancer treatment. Help is always available and you should tell your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- **Unexplained weight loss.**
- **Another breast lump.**
- **Significant back or bone pain.**
- **Any symptom that lasts for two weeks or more that you can not explain.**

Completing treatments that involve regular contact with medical staff can be both stressful and exciting. You will probably be relieved to finish treatments, yet it is hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is a very common concern among those who have had cancer. It may take a while before your confidence in your own recovery begins to feel real and your fears are somewhat relieved. Even with no recurrences, people who have had cancer learn to live with uncertainty.

Follow-up care

After initial treatment is completed, it is very important to go to all scheduled follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctor will ask questions about any symptoms, and will do a physical examination. Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects, some may last for a few weeks to several months, but others can be permanent. You should never hesitate to tell your doctor or other members of your cancer care team about any symptoms or side effects that concern you.

At first, your follow-up appointments will probably be scheduled for every six months with either your GP or specialist at the hospital. You will need to continue to have mammograms every year.

Other tests such as blood tumour marker studies, blood tests of liver function, bone scans, and chest x-rays are not usually needed unless symptoms or physical exam findings suggest it is likely the cancer has recurred.

Endocrine therapy

If you are taking **Tamoxifen**, be sure to tell your doctor right away about any abnormal vaginal bleeding, as there is a slightly increased risk of developing uterine cancer. Although this is usually caused by a non-cancerous condition, it may also be the first sign of uterine cancer.

If you are taking an **Aromatase Inhibitor** e.g. anastrozole or letrozole or exemestane, you may be at increased risk for thinning of the bones. A baseline Bone Density DEXA scan will have been requested when you started the tablets and should be repeated two yearly through your GP who will continue to monitor your bone health.

These treatments are normally continued for five years. It is very important that you continue taking these tablets as prescribed. If you are having problems then it is important to discuss your concerns with your nurse specialist, GP or surgeon as an alternative may well be available rather than just stop taking the tablets. These tablets are reducing your risk of recurrence and/or another breast cancer developing.

Managing menopausal symptoms

As a result of breast cancer treatment some women may develop early menopause or menopausal type symptoms.

Hot flushes and night sweats

- The hallmark and the most commonly associated symptom with menopause.
- A sensation of heat spreads over the body, in particular the head, face and chest and is often accompanied by flushing and sweating, followed by a chill.

emotionally draining, but it can also be a time to look at your life in new ways. Maybe you are thinking about how to improve your health over the long term. Some people even begin this process during cancer treatment.

Diet and nutrition

One of the best things you can do after treatment is to ensure you have healthy eating habits. You will be surprised at the long-term benefits of some simple changes, like increasing the variety of healthy foods you eat. Try to eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruits each day. Choose whole grain foods instead of white flour and sugars. Try to limit meats that are high in fat and cut back on processed foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Get rid of them altogether if you can. If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one or two drinks a day at the most. And don't forget to get some type of regular exercise. The combination of a good diet and regular exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight and keep you feeling more energetic.

Weight

For a woman diagnosed with breast cancer, achieving or maintaining a desirable weight may be one of the most important things you can do. Most studies have found that women who are overweight or obese when they are first diagnosed are more likely to have their disease recur and are more likely to die from breast cancer. They are also more at risk of developing lymphoedema.

Rest, fatigue and exercise

Fatigue is a very common symptom in people being treated for cancer. This is often not an ordinary type of tiredness but a "bone-weary" exhaustion that doesn't get better with rest. For some, this fatigue lasts a long time after treatment, and can discourage them from physical activity.

However, exercise can actually help you reduce fatigue. Studies have shown that patients who follow an exercise program tailored to their

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema, or swelling of the arm from buildup of fluid, may occur any time after treatment for breast cancer. Any treatment that involves axillary lymph node surgery or radiation to the axillary lymph nodes carries the risk of lymphoedema because normal drainage of lymph fluid from the arm is changed.

One of the first symptoms of lymphoedema may be a feeling of tightness in the arm or hand on the same side that was treated for breast cancer. Any swelling, tightness, or injury to the arm or hand should be reported promptly to your doctor.

There is no good way to predict who will and will not develop lymphoedema and most women do not. It can occur right after surgery, or months, or even years later. The possibility of developing lymphoedema remains throughout a woman's lifetime.

With care, lymphoedema can often be avoided or, if it develops, kept under control. Injury or infection involving the affected arm or hand can contribute to the development of lymphoedema or make existing lymphoedema worse, so preventive measures should focus on protecting the arm and hand. Most doctors recommend that women avoid having blood drawn from or blood pressures taken on the arm on the side of the lymph node surgery or radiation. We would recommend that you wear a compression sleeve during air travel. It is advisable to be put on before leaving home on the day of travel and not removed until you have reached your destination. Don't remove your sleeve until you have had your arm elevated for 15 minutes, or have been out for a brisk walk. If you have established lymphoedema then it is advisable to contact your physiotherapist or lymphoedema nurse to discuss the best management for you.

Lifestyle changes to consider during and after treatment

You can't change the fact that you have had cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life making healthy choices and feeling as well as possible, physically and emotionally. Having cancer and dealing with treatment can be time-consuming and

Tips:

- Avoid potential triggers - heavy clothing, overheating, hot drinks, caffeine, stress, hot weather, spicy foods, alcohol and smoking.
- Wear loose, cool fitting clothing (e.g. cotton and silk). Use an electric fan.
- Take cool showers. Use moist wipes to keep your skin cool.

Vaginal dryness

- Not something openly discussed but a symptom that is regularly experienced.
- The lining of the vagina needs oestrogen to stay lubricated and elastic.
- Loss of elasticity causes dryness leading to uncomfortable intercourse.
- Can make women more prone to vaginal infections such as thrush.
- Painful penetration - can develop tiny vaginal tears or splits due to involuntary muscle spasm.

Tips:

- Treat thrush - prescription creams, pessaries or natural remedies (non-hormonal therapies recommended). Wear loose cotton underwear. Avoid pantyhose and tights, tight jeans or trousers.
- Soap, shower gels, bubble bath or oils may irritate genital area. Wash with either 'Dove' or 'Simple' soap, or if very problematic consider using Aqueous cream (you can buy this from your pharmacy - 500ml jars available for a reasonable price), or can be obtained by prescription from your doctor.
- Moisturise vulval area after showering with Aqueous cream or Vaseline.
- Use non-perfumed water based lubricants prior to intercourse e.g. 'KY jelly' or 'Sylk'. You can also use olive oil, however beware that oil based products destroy condoms.
- 'Replens' is very effective, this is a long acting lubricant that is inserted into the vagina two or three times per week, this can only be bought on-line.

Loss of libido

- Loss of interest in sex or reduced sex drive may occur due to decreased estrogen levels.
- Body image concerns – scar, change in skin sensitivity or the sense of just not wanting to be touched are other common factors.
- Vaginal dryness and loss of enjoyment.
- Side effects of medication.

Tips:

- Communication with partners is of utmost importance, discuss how you are feeling. Seek counselling if problems are developing within your relationship.

Osteoporosis

- Menopause may cause bones to weaken and fracture more easily. (see Ministry of Health booklet 'Preventing Osteoporosis')

Tips:

- Calcium in your food helps keep bones strong - eat low-fat dairy food and high calcium food.
- Regular weight bearing exercises e.g. walking, tennis, jogging, dancing, cycling, golf and low impact aerobics all help reduce the rate of bone loss.
- Don't smoke.
- Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium, this can be obtained by spending 20 minutes a day in the sun, avoid between 11am and 4pm in the summer.

Other typical symptoms may include aches and pains, irritability, tiredness, loss of concentration, weight gain and depression. You may also feel anxious or experience mood swings.

Urinary symptoms

The urethra and bladder rely on oestrogen to function well. The loss of oestrogen reduces elasticity which may cause problems such as an increased need to urinate, pain or burning when passing urine, or bladder infections.

Tips:

- Drink plenty of water. Treat infections early. Go to the toilet after having intercourse. Keep vulva well moisturised.

Alternative therapies

- Little solid scientific evidence exists to support claims for alternative therapy benefiting menopausal health.
- Black cohosh has been shown in some trials to reduce hot flushes in peri-menopausal women. However there have been reports of liver damage with its use.
- Vitamin E (800mg), Vitamin C, selenium.
- Acupuncture.
- Support groups.

Lifestyle recommendations:

Diet

- Restrict intake of alcohol, caffeine, sugar and salt.
- Maintain a balanced diet that includes plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Physical activity

- Maintain a regular exercise routine.
- Maintain a regular and sufficient sleep schedule.

Stress management

- Massage – helps muscles relax and relieves built-up tension.
- Yoga – breathing, exercises and meditation calm the body and mind.
- Relaxation and/or meditation – these techniques will help in relieving tension and reducing stress.
- Tai Chi – a martial art that consists of slow, gentle, rhythmical movements. Good for calming the nerves and promoting relaxation.

If symptoms significantly impact your quality of life do not hesitate to discuss with your GP, as help is available.