

# Exercise may keep cancer patients healthier during, after treatment

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Breast and prostate cancer patients who regularly exercise during and after cancer treatment report having a better quality of life and being less fatigued, according to researchers at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

"Using exercise as an approach to cancer care has the potential to benefit patients both physically and psychologically, as well as mitigate treatment side effects," says study lead author Eleanor M. Walker, M.D., division director of breast services in the Department of Radiation [Oncology](#) at Henry Ford Hospital.

"Plus, exercise is a great alternative to patients combating fatigue and nausea who are considering using supplements which may interfere with medications and [chemotherapy](#) they're taking during [cancer treatment](#)."

Dr. Walker will present a poster with the study's design and intervention methods June 7 at the 2010 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting in Chicago. The abstract is now available online at [www.ASCO.org](http://www.ASCO.org).

To study how exercise impacts cancer patients, Dr. Walker and her colleagues at Henry Ford's Josephine Ford Cancer Center and the Henry Ford Heart & Vascular Institute developed a unique program called ExCITE (Exercise and Cancer Integrative Therapies and Education).

ExCITE works with patients who are receiving cancer treatment to create individualized exercise programs. Some patients come into one of

Henry Ford's fitness centers to workout, while others have plans that allow them to exercise at home during various stages of their care.

The study group thus far includes 30 female breast cancer patients and 20 [prostate cancer](#) patients, all ranging in age from 35 to 80. All were newly diagnosed when they began ExCITE. The study followed the patients during treatment and for one-year following completion of cancer treatment.

Before beginning the exercise program, Henry Ford's Preventative Cardiology Division measured the patients' exercise capacity, skeletal muscle strength and endurance. General blood work, metabolic screens, bone density and inflammatory biomarkers also were obtained at the start of the program.

Exercise and diet recommendation for each patient were based on their baseline exercise tolerances, weight, overall health, and type of cancer treatment they would receive. Acupuncture was used for patients who experienced hot flashes, pain, nausea/vomiting, insomnia and neuropathy as the result of cancer treatment.

Cheryl Fallen of Gross Pointe Park, Mich., was undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer while she took part in the ExCITE program. Through a mix of exercise, acupuncture and good nutrition, she didn't experiencing some of the more common side-effects from treatment - [nausea](#), [fatigue](#) and trouble with memory.

"ExCITE offers cancer patients a way to holistically approach their cancer care by tailoring a specific exercise routine to fit the needs of the patient, whether it's rehabilitation after surgery, or to enhance circulation or improve the immune system prior to chemotherapy or radiation," says Fallen.

When her white blood cell count fell during chemotherapy, Fallen would work out at home using an exercise band or by walking outdoors. When she was well enough to return to the gym, her workouts consisted of using the exercise ball and treadmill, and doing other strength-training exercises.

"Overall, the program makes you feel better about yourself. It's a positive support for cancer patients, and I really think it's allowed me to be more productive during my treatment," says Fallen.

Study of the ExCITE program is ongoing, with Dr. Walker and her colleagues continuing to investigate the potential benefits of exercise for cancer patients.

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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