

Is it safe to exercise while undergoing cancer treatment?

April 5 2013

Exercise can improve the quality of life for cancer survivors as well as for patients still undergoing treatment, based on an extensive review I was involved in as a research librarian. The massive study was a systematic review, a type of research whose goal is to retrieve all the relevant research that has already been completed on a topic and answer specific clinical questions.

The results from studies around the world showed that exercise programs can be beneficial, although more research needs to be done to determine which kinds of exercise are best. The activities in the studies that were evaluated included walking, bicycling, [resistance training](#) and yoga. The review looked at their effect on areas that make up quality of life, such as fatigue, anxiety and [emotional health](#).

The researchers conducted two reviews. The [first study](#) examined 56 trials with a total of 4,826 participants undergoing treatment. The [second](#) evaluated information on more than 3,500 people who had completed treatment. Both studies compared the quality of life of patients who exercised with that of patients who did not exercise; overall both showed exercise to be beneficial.

In the first case, for patients undergoing treatment, the researchers learned that exercise may improve a person's [physical abilities](#) and how they function in society. Exercise also reduced fatigue. The more intense the exercise, we found, the greater the benefits.

The second study included 40 trials with 3,694 people who had finished [cancer treatment](#). The results showed that exercise may reduce worry about cancer and positively affect the way people view their body. It may also help someone cope with [emotional problems](#) and reduce anxiety, fatigue and pain.

In both cases, however, findings need to be viewed with caution, because the reviews looked at many different kinds of [exercise programs](#) that varied by the type of exercise, length of the program and intensity. Also, the studies reviewed used a number of different ways to measure quality of life.

This type of work is something more librarians are becoming involved in, and I hope research faculty will continue to take advantage of our expertise. The cancer and exercise study, for example, took several years and included developing a complicated search strategy and keeping detailed records of searches and results. Systematic reviews are complex but rewarding and are capable of producing useful results that answer specific clinical questions.

Provided by Tufts University

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