



Breast Cancer and the Benefits of Exercise

By Joe Stein, President



Moving Forward

According to a 2005 study by the American Cancer Society, one in seven women will develop breast cancer; that's the bad news. The good news is that the five-year survival rate is nearly 90%.

Increasing Your Odds

Exercise may not be the cure for cancer, but according to a 2005 study by Dr. Holmes, M.D., et al, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, exercise reduces the risk of dying from the disease. Women who exercised on a regular basis at moderate intensity had fewer cancer recurrences and experienced a decrease in the 10-year mortality rate. The research clearly showed that women with breast cancer who are physically active live longer than women who are sedentary.

Benefits of Exercise

Beyond living longer, many quality of life issues are greatly improved with exercise: In a 1999 study published in *Psycho oncology*, regarding the rehabilitation of breast cancer survivors, exercise enhances immune function during chemotherapy and decreases the fatigue often associated with this type of treatment. In addition, the increase in weight and body fat associated with chemotherapy can be reduced. Not only does this boost one's self esteem, but research by Dr. Carolyn Kaelin, Director of the Comprehensive Breast Health Center at Brigham and Women's Hospital, has shown that long-term survival rates increase for those who gain 12 pounds or less. Another benefit: Strength training with moderately heavy resistance can attenuate the reduction in bone mass density often associated with chemotherapy.

Many women experience limited range of motion and postural changes due to mastectomies and reconstructive surgeries. Gentle flexibility exercises combined with posture awareness and balance training can improve the daily quality of life.

In instances where lymph nodes have been removed, developing and implementing an exercise program must be done with even greater care because of the need to reduce the risk of lymph edema, swelling of the arm due to poor lymph fluid drainage.

Proceed with Caution

The 2006 edition of the *American College of Sports Medicine's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* does *not* contain exercise prescriptions for training clients with cancer. Instead, the key to success is conferring with the patient's physician during each step of the healing process. With proper clearance and guidance, a comprehensive program can be developed to address cardiovascular conditioning for weight

maintenance, strength training for osteoporosis prevention, balance training for fall prevention, and flexibility training to improve range of motion and posture.

A gently progressive program of exercises, along with expert guidance from your doctor and a qualified fitness professional can combine with a positive attitude to foster healing and self-efficacy.

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