

Exercise and Breast Cancer



About us

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak national organisation for Australians affected by breast cancer. We provide a range of free resources for women with breast cancer, including the *My Journey Kit* for women newly diagnosed with early breast cancer and *Hope & Hurdles* for women with secondary breast cancer. BCNA's free quarterly magazine *The Beacon* includes stories from women with breast cancer, as well as information on a wide range of breast cancer issues.

Bakers Delight

Since 2000 BCNA has nurtured a strong relationship with our Major Partner, Bakers Delight. With more than 600 bakeries across Australia, this partnership has been so successful due to the incredible passion and commitment of the whole Bakers Delight network. Each year we join forces for the annual Pink Bun campaign which has raised millions of dollars to help us continue to provide free information and support. Our partnership has helped BCNA to grow and ensure our support reaches those who need it most.

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Raelene Boyle's story

BCNA Board Member and ambassador

As you grow older, you realise that life is all about balance, and often due to busy lives we can lose that balance. I certainly lost it with breast cancer and I found myself feeling unwell and very down.

Desperate for a change I decided to start exercising again. Even though I'd been fit when I was younger, it was a bit of a process getting into it after breast cancer. I started out just by walking, and now I have been consistently exercising for five years. I now walk for an hour five days of the week, and go to the gym to do strength and aerobic exercise three times a week.

The results have made a real difference to my day-to-day life and health. Amazingly I have more energy and don't tire as much during the day. I haven't lost weight but my body has actually toned up, which has really helped with my body image. It also helps with my eating habits, because on the days that I exercise I'm more conscious of what I eat.

Exercise also gives me better clarity of mind. I do lots of thinking during my walks, and will often use the time to plan the rest of the day. I used to think about all that stuff lying in bed at night, which meant I had trouble sleeping. Now that I use my walking time to plan, I sleep better.

I realise some people struggle to find any time to exercise. The reality is, you don't really think about whether you can fit time to eat into your day. Come breakfast, lunch and dinner, you eat! I think of exercise the same way. It's just part of my day.

On days when I don't exercise, I don't let myself get down about it. I allow myself the time off, and simply pick up where I left off the next day.

My message to women is that there is life after breast cancer and you have the power to turn your life around. We are all different. Some will take longer than others, and that is part of the individual journey. Exercise is one of the cheapest and most rewarding ways to help yourself ... all you really need is a pair of runners. Exercise has, without a doubt, made a huge difference to my life.

Introduction

This booklet is designed to help women diagnosed with breast cancer to exercise regularly and has been developed in consultation with women diagnosed with breast cancer, health professionals and researchers. It contains information about the benefits of exercise, the amount of exercise that is recommended for women, types of exercises and practical tips to guide you.

We know that regular exercise has enormous benefits for our general health and wellbeing, and in the prevention of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

For women diagnosed with breast cancer, regular exercise during and following treatment has been shown to improve both physical and emotional health, and overall quality of life. It can help to improve body weight, muscle strength, confidence, mood, depression and anxiety. Research also indicates that regular exercise helps women manage some of the physical side effects of breast cancer treatment, such as fatigue, pain, lymphoedema and lowered bone density.

There is good evidence that exercise may also reduce the risk of breast cancer coming back, with one research review involving more than 12,000 women finding that regular exercise after a breast cancer diagnosis may reduce the risk by as much as 24 per cent.

Some women tell us that they think of exercise as part of their breast cancer treatment; it is a way for them to actively improve their health without taking any drugs.

I see exercise as essential to healing my body. I think of it as part of my treatment – just like I have my chemotherapy, I go for a swim or bike ride. – Amanda

For other women, it may take some time for exercise to become a regular part of life. When you begin to include exercise in your routine, it's important to focus on the exercise you managed to complete. If you are unable to meet your exercise goals, this is not a failure – you can simply start afresh next week.

Throughout my treatment, whenever I exercised – even when I felt stuffed – I always felt better for it afterwards. I slept better, my aches and pains lessened, and I got out and about with my girlfriends. I couldn't do anything like my usual exercise routines, but just being outside and trying hard made me feel stronger. Your body can recover; you can become strong and healthy again. And when you feel strong and healthy, the sun shines brighter, the sky is bluer, and your steps are lighter. – Heather



When can I start exercising?

You can start exercising any time during or after treatment for breast cancer. In general, the earlier you start the better; however, it is never too late to start. It's important to start exercising slowly, and gradually build up to the recommended level of exercise, rather than exercising too much or too intensely when you first begin. This is important even if you have exercised regularly in the past.

I notice that a walk really makes me feel better in the week after my chemotherapy. I was surprised at how it not only lifted my mood ... but I physically felt better and lighter in spirit. – Sarah

You are never too old to begin exercising. In fact, exercise can help to manage some of the physical changes that many women face as they get older, for example, painful joints.

No matter how old you are, or whether you are undergoing treatment or not, it's important to speak with your doctor or a member of your treatment team about your exercise plans before you start exercising.

How much exercise is enough for me?

Research suggests that any amount of exercise is better than none, and more exercise is generally better than less. It is recommended that women diagnosed with breast cancer complete the same level of exercise recommended for all Australian adults by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing – at least two-and-a-half hours of moderate intensity exercise per week. You can achieve this by doing 30 minutes of exercise five days of the week.

If you are currently undergoing treatment and are just starting to exercise, or if you have not exercised for a while, it is important to gradually build up to the recommended amount of exercise. To do this, you can break down your 30 minutes of exercise into shorter periods throughout the day, for example, exercise for 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the afternoon.

I used to think that I needed to be available for a full hour to go for my walk and be happy. If I didn't have an hour available I wouldn't go at all. I soon realised that I could still go for 20 or 30 minutes, which still made me feel good and was better than nothing at all. – Glenda

There may be times when you simply feel too unwell to exercise. During these times it is okay to give yourself a break. Be kind to yourself and pick up where you left off as soon as you feel able to.

How 'hard' should I exercise?

'Moderate intensity exercise' refers to exercise that makes breathing a bit harder, but does not make you feel completely out of breath. For example, walking briskly where you can talk but not sing. Or walking as if you are late for an appointment. If you are doing moderate intensity strength-based exercises with weights, you should be able to lift the weights at least 8–12 times without needing to take a break.

If you are currently undergoing treatment or you are just starting out, it's important to start exercising at a lower intensity and progress to a moderate level of intensity over time.

If you are very physically fit and have been active for some time, you may choose to exercise at a higher intensity. When exercising at a higher intensity, your breathing is increased so that you can still talk but would be quite breathless doing so.

Summary of recommendations for women

- Two-and-a-half hours of exercise per week (around 30 minutes each day for five days, or around 50 minutes each day for three days)
- Moderate intensity – increased breathing where you are able to talk but not sing
- Start slowly and gradually build up to the recommended level of exercise over time

Engaging in some form of exercise became part my daily routine during treatment. My mantra became to 'do something (however little) everyday'. I walked (sometimes very slowly) at every opportunity; I stretched, breathed and watched my diet. I began to swim as soon as my scars healed and my armpit swelling disappeared. My brain also defogged and my mood lifted. I have since found that if I do not swim regularly, my joints tell me and I start to curse Arimidex again. When the pool closed for maintenance I headed to the gym for the first time ever. My clumsiness at my step and pump classes made me laugh so hard it hurt! – Fiona

What types of exercises can I try?

While there are many different types of exercise that you can try, the important thing is to find something that you enjoy because you are more likely to maintain it. You may have to try a few different types of exercise before you find one that you enjoy. You may also choose to alternate the types of exercise you do to keep it interesting. For example, you could consider alternating walking, yoga and swimming on different days.

Some types of exercises that you may like to try include:

- walking or jogging
- swimming or water aerobics
- dancing, e.g. salsa, belly dancing or ballroom dancing
- golf
- cycling
- gym classes, such as aerobics or step classes
- group sport such as netball
- yoga
- Pilates
- lifting weights
- dragon boating
(details on how to find a club are at the back of this booklet)

As soon as I was well enough I resumed dancing, finding it vigorous enough to get a workout but not overdo my recovering arm from surgery, as well as lifting my spirits by helping me feel somewhat normal again. – Carolyn

I have been on continual chemotherapy for the past 15 months. Just these past two weeks I have started swimming and it is liberating. I am currently on a treatment that doesn't seem to interfere too much with my white cell count so I got my oncologist's OK to swim! I battle fatigue daily but exercise definitely helps me to keep on top of it. – Amanda

Some breast cancer treatments can lower your bone density and increase your risk of bone fracture, including the hormone therapies tamoxifen (lowers bone density only in pre-menopausal women) and aromatase inhibitors (Arimidex®, Femara® and Aromasin®). Certain exercises have been shown to be very good at increasing bone density and reducing your risk of fracture, including:

- 'Weight-bearing exercises' – these are exercises where your body has to bear its own weight. In general, you do these exercises while on your feet. Examples include walking, jogging, netball, tennis and dancing. Swimming and cycling are not weight-bearing exercises.
- 'Resistance training exercises' – these exercises involve exercising with weights, including free weights or weight machines found in gyms.

Aqua aerobic classes are great fun and I would recommend them to anyone, especially as exercises in the water are easy on your joints, and you can set your own pace. The classes are also a great way to meet new friends and, if you can find an early morning class, it is a great way to start your day. – Ann

Precautions

- You may be at an increased risk of bone fracture, for example, if you have low bone mineral density, are menopausal or post-menopausal, are an older women, or have bone metastases. If you are at an increased risk of bone fracture, avoid high-impact exercise and exercises where you are at an increased risk of falling. Try lower-impact exercises such as walking, swimming or yoga.
- You may be at an increased risk of infection, for example, if you are currently undergoing chemotherapy and have a reduced white cell count. If you are at an increased risk of infection, and you would like to swim in a pool, it is a good idea to check this with your medical oncologist first.
- If you have any questions or concerns about exercising during or after treatment, seek advice from a member of your medical team.

Exercises that I enjoy or will try

Write down three exercises below:

1

2

3

What about incidental exercise?

Incidental exercise refers to regular daily activities such as housework or gardening. Incidental exercise will only contribute to the two-and-a-half hours of recommended exercise per week if it is 'moderate intensity'. Remember, 'moderate intensity' exercise means that your breath has noticeably increased to a point where you can talk while exercising, but you cannot sing.

Incidental exercises that you can include in your daily routine:

- walking up the stairs instead of using the lift
- walking to the shops instead of driving
- getting off the train or bus a few stops early and walking the rest of the way
- walking the dog
- household tasks such as cleaning and gardening.

I take the dog out every day. It helps me stay normal to stick to a bit of a routine, but also I find it helps with digestion and it just makes me happy. Even on really cold days, the sky is blue and people's gardens are changing every day. Meet folks out walking who say hi or stop for a chat. I garden as well. I've got big gardens and I do it because I love it. Everyone is different so it's really up to you but it certainly has helped me. – Anthea

How do I get going and stay motivated?

We know that for some women it can be challenging to start exercising and to keep it up regularly. Setting short and long-term goals, and rewarding yourself when you reach them, can help to motivate you to keep exercising regularly.

When writing your goals down, we suggest you follow the 'SMART' method to ensure your goals are achievable.

- S**pecific – What exactly do you want to achieve?
Measurable – How many minutes or days? Or how many times per week?
Achievable – Is your body capable of achieving your goal?
Realistic – Does your goal realistically fit into your lifestyle?
Time frame – In what time frame do you want to achieve your goal?

My short-term goal

Write a short-term goal that you would like to work towards. For example, write down the exercise you would like to do this week.

I will start exercising on _____.

I will _____ (type of exercise) for _____ minutes,
_____ times a week. If I do this for _____ weeks, I will reward
myself by _____.

For example, 'I will start exercising on Tuesday. I will go swimming or walking for 30 minutes, five times a week. If I do this for five weeks, I will reward myself by getting a massage or manicure!'

My long-term goal

Write down a long-term goal that you would like to work towards. For example, what long-term benefit you would like to achieve from exercising, and when you would like to achieve it by.

I would like to _____ by _____.

My reward will be _____.

For example, 'I would like to lose 5 kilograms before Christmas this year. If I manage to do this, I will reward myself by booking a weekend trip away.'

Keeping track of the exercise you complete in a diary may help to keep you motivated as you will be able to see, at a glance, what you have achieved. We have included a diary at the back of this booklet to record the exercise you complete.

It's important to remember that if you don't achieve your exercise goals, for whatever reason, this is not a failure. Try focusing on the exercise that you completed, and gradually work your way towards meeting your goals.

Some days I just can't do it no matter how hard I try or want to. Sometimes my body just won't let me. I have now learnt not to beat myself up about it, and I have accepted that now, but it did take some time to accept that I can't be superwoman. – Michele

Tips to stay motivated

- Organise to exercise with a friend or family member, or a small group. This may help you to keep your exercise 'date', and it may also help to make exercise more enjoyable.
- Tell your friends and family that you want to exercise regularly and ask them to encourage you. You can also share this guide with them.
- Find an exercise you enjoy to help keep you motivated. This may take some 'trial and error' however it will be well worth the effort.
- Alternate the type of exercise you do to help to keep things interesting. For example, you could alternate swimming, Pilates and walking on different days. If you prefer to walk, you may also like to try changing your walking route from time to time.
- Listen to music or a podcast while exercising to keep your mind occupied. A podcast is an audio recording (for example, a documentary or an episode of a news show) which can be downloaded from the internet onto an mp3 player such as an iPod or a smart phone.

To stop myself from getting bored while I walk, I listen to music on my iPod. Sometimes I listen to an episode of 'This American Life', or 'Conversations with Richard Fidler' on ABC radio, which I download onto my iPod. – Terry

Finding the time

If you find it difficult fitting regular exercise into your day, you might like to try some of the following tips:

- Schedule time into your day for exercise, like you would an appointment. If exercise is scheduled into your routine, you are more likely to do it.
- Wake up 30 minutes earlier than you normally would and exercise in the morning.
- Walk instead of driving or catching public transport.
- Go for a brisk walk during your lunch break at work.
- Meet a friend for a walk in the park instead of meeting for lunch.

With a part-time job and young family to care for, finding time for regular exercise is difficult, but it's worthwhile for the feeling of improved health, weight loss (darned chemo kilos), stress and anxiety relief (reduction in mood swings), improved sleep (less insomnia) and potential reduction in risk of recurrence. – Lou



What about other hurdles?

Exercise and fatigue

We know that many women experience fatigue, particularly during treatment. Research has shown, however, that participating in regular exercise can actually help to manage fatigue and boost your energy levels. If you experience fatigue, you may find the following tips useful:

- Start exercising slowly and gently, and gradually build up the amount and intensity of exercise. You may like to start by going for a 10 minute walk in the morning, and again in the afternoon and evening.
- Exercise at a time in the day when you feel the least tired. If you tire more as the day passes, try exercising in the morning.

Reducing the cost of exercise

We know the cost of gym memberships or purchasing your own exercise equipment can really add up. Here are some practical ways to keep the cost of exercising down:

- Walk or jog outside – it's free.
- Exercise with a skipping rope in the backyard. You can buy a skipping rope from your local sports equipment store, usually for under \$20.
- Instead of buying exercise equipment, you can rent it. A treadmill, stationary bicycle, cross trainer or rowing machine can each be rented for around \$10–\$20 per week.
- You don't need to go out and purchase new exercise clothes. Try wearing an old T-shirt and shorts.

I have always found that walking helps me to relax; it keeps me calm, centred and clears my mind. It helps me think. It is also an excellent way of escaping the dreary domestic duties I leave behind for a few hours and forget about imminent doctors' appointments or medical tests. – Jenny

Exercising in cold weather

To maintain regular exercise in the cooler weather consider:

- trying exercises that can be done in your home or at the gym, for example, yoga or Pilates, light weights with dumbbells, or walking on a treadmill
- 'warming up' first by starting slowly and gradually increasing your pace
- dressing in layers so you can remove layers as you warm up.

Exercising in warmer weather

To maintain regular exercise in the warmer weather consider:

- keeping your body hydrated by regularly drinking water before, during and after exercising
- avoiding exercising outside between 10 am and 3 pm, which tends to be the hottest part of the day. Generously apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going outside. It is best to use sunscreen that is SPF 30+, broad-spectrum (protects against both UVA and UVB rays) and waterproof. Wearing sunglasses, a broad-brimmed hat, and loose clothing with long sleeves to protect yourself from the sun is also a good idea
- exercising indoors with a fan or air-conditioning.

There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing. If it's cold I wear a coat, hat and gloves. Even when the sun's out, I still walk with an umbrella for shade and protection from the sun. People might give me funny looks but I'm doing this for my own good, and don't care what they think. – Glenda

Should I be concerned about lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema, or swelling of the arm, hand or breast, is a condition that sometimes develops in women who have lymph nodes removed or damaged during their breast cancer surgery.

Some women are surprised to hear that participating in regular exercise has not been shown to cause lymphoedema. In fact, there is some research to show that participating in regular exercise can help to reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema. If you already have lymphoedema, research has shown that regular exercise does not make it worse and in fact, has been shown to help manage the symptoms of lymphoedema. However, it's important to speak with a qualified lymphoedema therapist before you start exercising.

They may suggest that you wear a lymphoedema compression garment during exercise. Compression garments can be quite costly, but there are subsidies available in most Australian states and territories that cover some or all of the cost of garments. BCNA's fact sheet on lymphoedema compression garment subsidies includes a list of subsidies available in Australia. Refer to the section on Information Resources for details on how to obtain a copy.

Whether or not you have been diagnosed with lymphoedema, remember that if you are just beginning to exercise, it's important to start slowly and gradually build up over time to the recommended level of exercise.

Early warning signs of lymphoedema

It is important to stop exercising and promptly seek medical advice from a member of your medical team if you notice any of the early warning signs of lymphoedema, including:

- swelling of the arm, breast or hand (you may notice your rings, sleeves or wristbands feel tight)
- feelings of discomfort, heaviness or fullness in the arm, hand or breast
- aching, pain, or tension in the arm, shoulder, hand, chest or breast area.

I decided it was time to join my local gym to build up strength. Luckily my gym has a pool, so I started swimming laps, which I hadn't done since I left school some 45 years ago. I also started aqua aerobics which has really helped the lymphoedema in my arm. My radiologist has told me that swimming and exercising in the pool is really helpful as the water acts like a gentle massage. – Ann

Should I be worried about my weight?

Weight gain is very common after a breast cancer diagnosis. Many women gain weight because their energy intake (calories) is greater than the energy they expend. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including the onset of menopause; as a side effect of some breast cancer treatments; reduced activity levels because of fatigue, feeling unwell, lack of motivation; and changes in eating habits.

Weight gain can make women feel guilty, and impact their body image and self-confidence. If you have gained weight since your diagnosis of breast cancer, it's important to be kind to yourself and remember that many women have trouble maintaining their weight after their diagnosis.

Maintaining a healthy weight has many important benefits for women diagnosed with breast cancer. It can help to improve:

- self-confidence and body image
- concentration
- energy levels.

It can help to reduce:

- blood pressure
- cholesterol levels
- risk of developing heart disease or diabetes.

There is also some research to suggest that losing a small amount of weight after a breast cancer diagnosis may help to reduce your risk of the breast cancer recurring. More research is needed to better understand this relationship.

To find out if you are at a healthy body weight, you can calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI) using the following formula:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{(weight in kilograms)}}{\text{(height in metres x height in metres)}}$$

For example, if you weigh 75kg and are 169cm (or 1.69m) tall, you would calculate your BMI as follows:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{75}{(1.69 \times 1.69)} = 26.3$$

After you have calculated your BMI, you can see whether you are at a healthy weight by using the following table:

BMI	You are
Less than 18.5	underweight
between 18.5 and 24.9	healthy weight
between 25 and 29.9	overweight
above 30	obese

In this example, a woman who has a BMI of 26.3 is considered overweight.

If you find that you are above your healthy weight, it's important to remember that the safest and most effective way to lose weight is to do it slowly. A realistic amount of weight to lose each week is about half a kilogram. This may vary from week to week, for example, you may find that you lose no weight in one week and 1kg in another. Strict diet and exercise regimes that result in rapid weight loss are difficult to maintain and usually result in women gaining even more weight over the long term.

The healthiest way to lose weight is to:

- eat a healthy balanced diet, based on plenty of fresh vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, and reduce the amount of fatty, salty and sugary foods in your diet
- participate in regular exercise. If you are already doing this, consider increasing the amount or intensity of exercise.

If you would like to lose some weight, it is also a good idea to speak with your doctor or an accredited practicing dietitian as s/he will be able to offer advice for your individual situation.

I put on 14 kg after chemotherapy. Unfortunately food is my friend and I ate my way through it. I guess we have to do our best to get through somehow. I decided that I had to help myself. Weight loss is hard because I love my food, but it had to be done. I joined Weight Watchers and have lost about 7kgs so am half way there, but am also starting to feel a little better and have more energy. I felt like I have been given a second chance so I have to help myself now. I am also walking 40 minutes five days per week. Once you finish your treatment give yourself some time for the dust to settle and then make a plan for your recovery. It's hard at the start but it gets better. – Joanne

What about my diet?

Healthy eating means balancing your diet with plenty of healthy foods such as vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, cutting back a bit on the not-so-healthy food, and continuing to enjoy in moderation the things you love to eat. Healthy eating helps to provide you with the energy needed to exercise regularly. Combined with regular exercise, healthy eating also improves your overall health and reduces your risk of developing other illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Breast cancer has had some positive effects on me. I've made lifestyle changes: diet, exercise, yoga and meditation. – Sharon

You may hear about various diets for people diagnosed with cancer, however, there is no scientific evidence that women diagnosed with breast cancer need to follow a 'special' diet or eat particular foods to prevent the cancer returning. It is recommended that women with breast cancer follow the same dietary guidelines that are recommended to all Australian adults. That is, eating a healthy, balanced diet which includes:

- plenty of vegetables, fruit, and legumes. Aim for five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit each day. Think of your vegetables as a rainbow and aim to eat as many colours as possible each day, which will help you to obtain many different nutrients
- cereals, preferably wholegrain, including bread, rice, pasta and noodles
- some lean meat, fish and poultry. Try to eat fish at least 2–3 times a week (fresh or canned). It is recommended that you limit your intake of red meat to 500g a week
- reduced-fat dairy foods including milk, yoghurt and cheese – it is recommended that women have around three servings of calcium-rich food daily. This is particularly important for women diagnosed with breast cancer, as many breast cancer treatments reduce bone mineral density which may lead to osteoporosis. It is also important that your vitamin D level is healthy as this aids the absorption of calcium by your body.
- plenty of water – it is recommended that you drink eight 250ml glasses daily (around 2L) although this can be accumulated by drinking different types of fluids such as tea.

I try and eat seasonal foods; a bit of this and a bit of that, spices and herbs too. I also go for walks because they make me feel more relaxed afterwards. – Kathy

It is also recommended that you cut back on the amount of:

- foods high in saturated fat and salt such as fatty meats, takeaway foods, biscuits, high fat and salt snack foods and cakes
- food and drink that is high in sugar such as cakes, biscuits, fruit juice and soft drink
- alcohol – the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends healthy Australian adults drink no more than two standard drinks a day. The Cancer Council Australia recommends people avoid drinking alcohol if possible, or follow the NHMRC recommendation. 'One standard drink' in Australia contains 10 grams of alcohol. As an example, 100ml of wine is one standard drink. It's important to note that quite often one serving of alcohol may contain more than one standard drink. For example, if you pour yourself a glass of wine and fill the glass, the glass may contain around 150–200ml of wine, which is equivalent to 1.5 to 2 standard drinks.

I love chocolate so I have a small amount once a week. You don't have to deny yourself but rather ration the treats out a bit. I'm sure you know what your favourite naughty foods are so only keep enough in the cupboard for a small treat. If you can just budge 1kg then it will spur you on. I'm going to weigh myself every two or three weeks because I want to lose about 5kg but I'm not in a hurry. – Tonya

Radical changes to your diet, such as cutting out particular food groups, are not recommended as they may affect your energy levels, and may lead to various dietary deficiencies. If you make radical changes to your diet in order to lose weight, it is unlikely that you will maintain weight loss in the long term.

Many people take vitamin supplements and herbal and homeopathic treatments. These complementary medicines can sometimes interfere with breast cancer treatments, for example, St John's Wort can reduce the effectiveness of tamoxifen. If you are thinking about making significant changes to your diet or adding particular supplements, talk to a member of your medical team or an accredited practicing dietitian first.

I took advice from the hospital dietitian about foods that were good for me. – Kathryn

The following tips may help you eat a healthy balanced diet:

- Try to choose foods that are lower in fat, such as reduced-fat dairy foods and lean meats, including chicken and fish.
- Try to choose foods that are lower in salt, such as unsalted nuts instead of the salted variety. Also, try to use herbs and spices to add flavour to your food instead of adding salt.
- If you don't enjoy drinking plain water and struggle to drink eight glasses every day, try drinking herbal tea or adding a few leaves of fresh mint or a slice of lime to your glass of water. All fluids such as soups and other drinks count, but be careful to avoid increasing the amount of sugary drinks that you have, as these may contribute to weight gain.
- Many hospitals and community health centres have dietitians who can provide advice on healthy eating if you have concerns about your diet.

- There are plenty of healthy recipes that can be found by searching the internet. Try visiting www.taste.com.au, a website that contains thousands of recipes. You can search for recipes by keyword, for example 'vegetable lasagne', or by browsing categories such as 'healthy snacks', 'low fat recipes', and 'lower cholesterol recipes'.
- Keep a food diary to see, at a glance, what your eating habits are like which may help you identify how you can improve them.

Exercise programs

There are a number of exercise programs available that are specifically designed for women diagnosed with breast cancer, or people with cancer in general. Some programs are gentle and may be suitable if you are currently undergoing treatment or you have not exercised in a while, whereas other programs are higher intensity.

BCNA's Local Services Directory is designed to help you find breast cancer related services – including exercise programs – by location and type. To find out if there is a program in your area, or to suggest a program to other women, visit www.bcna.org.au > [Sharing & Support](#) > [Find services and support near you](#).

- YWCA Encore is a free eight-week program of gentle floor and pool based exercises for women diagnosed with breast cancer. The program also includes relaxation and information on topics such as nutrition. While the program is available to women who have been diagnosed at any time, it may be particularly helpful to assist women in managing the side effects of surgery and treatment, helping to restore strength, mobility and flexibility, confidence and general wellbeing.

To find out if there is an Encore program in your area, visit www.ywcaencore.org.au or phone [1800 305 150](tel:1800305150).

- BCNA's 'Strengthen your recovery: a Pilates program following breast cancer surgery' DVD

This program has been designed specifically to provide practical information and exercises for the 10 weeks following surgery. The program helps prevent pain and stiffness in the upper body and is a safe, gentle way for women to regain strength and mobility after surgery. The program is provided on a DVD for women to use at home.

If you have recently had breast cancer surgery and would like more information about this program, visit www.bcna.org.au > [New diagnosis](#) > [Treatment](#) > [Surgery](#) > [Staying mobile after surgery](#), or phone 1800 500 258.

- Cancer Councils in a number of states and territories run exercise programs. To ask if there is an exercise program in your area, phone 13 11 20.
- Dragons Abreast Australia is a national organisation of women diagnosed with breast cancer who get together to participate in dragon boating. Women of any level of fitness can join. Many women join Dragons Abreast to help manage their lymphoedema.

To find out if there is a Dragons Abreast group in your area, visit www.dragonsabreast.com.au, or phone 1300 889 566.

- Pink Pilates is an individually tailored 10-week Pilates program specifically designed for women who have been diagnosed with cancer. Women of any level of fitness are welcome to join. The cost of the program is around \$700. If you have private health insurance, you may like to ask your provider if they will cover some of the cost of this program.

To find out if there is a Pink Pilates program available in your area, visit www.pinkpilates.com.au.

- Heart Foundation Walking runs free walking groups around Australia for anyone who is interested in keeping active. Every walking group is different, and can vary in the number of people in the group, and the length and intensity of the walk. To find out if there is a walking group in your area, visit www.heartfoundation.org.au > [Active living](#) > [Walking](#), or phone 1300 362 787.



Information resources

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA)

- BCNA has a number of fact sheets that provide information on lymphoedema, including state and territory run subsidy schemes that may assist some women with the cost of lymphoedema compression garments. To obtain a copy, visit www.bcna.org.au > [Fact sheets](#), or phone 1800 500 258.
- The Beacon magazine is BCNA's free national magazine for women with breast cancer and their families and friends. It is published quarterly, and contains information on research, treatment, support options, events and personal stories from women affected by breast cancer. To search for past editions that have focused on exercise and keeping active, visit www.bcna.org.au > [News](#) > [Beacon magazine](#) > [Beacon archive](#), or phone 1800 500 258.
- BCNA's Online Network is a place for women diagnosed with breast cancer to connect and share their experiences and tips with others in a similar situation. If you would like to connect with other women, visit www.bcna.org.au > [Online network](#).
- BCNA's Local Services Directory is designed to help you find breast cancer-related support and services by location and type. To find services in your area, or to suggest a service to other women, visit www.bcna.org.au > [Sharing & Support](#) > [Find services and support near you](#).

Cancer Council Queensland

- *Exercise after breast cancer surgery* is a fact sheet that explains gentle exercises that you can do to improve the movement of your arm and shoulder after breast cancer surgery. The fact sheet contains explanations and diagrams to help you understand how to do these exercises. To obtain a copy, visit www.cancerqld.org.au > [Information and resources](#) > [Order resources: Patients, family and friends](#), or phone 13 11 20 (from within Queensland) or (07) 3634 5100 from elsewhere.
- *Understanding nutrition* is a booklet that contains information and practical advice on good nutrition before, during and after cancer treatment. To obtain a copy, visit www.cancerqld.org.au > [Information and resources](#) > [Order resources: Patients, family and friends](#), or phone 13 11 20 (from within Queensland) or (07) 3634 5100 from elsewhere.



Cancer Council Western Australia

- *Exercise for people living with cancer* is a comprehensive booklet that provides information on overcoming treatment-related side effects, and includes a week-long sample exercise program. To obtain a copy, visit www.cancerwa.asn.au > Publications > Publications for patients, families and friends, or phone 13 11 20 (from within Western Australia) or (08) 9212 4333 from elsewhere.

Eat for Health

- The Eat for Health website provides up-to-date advice about the types and amounts of foods that we need to eat for health and wellbeing. The recommendations are based on the latest research. The website also includes calculators you can use to estimate your personal energy needs and nutrient requirements. Visit www.eatforhealth.gov.au.

www.taste.com.au

- This website contains thousands of recipes, which can be searched by keyword, for example 'vegetable lasagne', or by browsing categories such as 'healthy snacks', 'low fat recipes', and 'lower cholesterol recipes'. To search for a recipe, visit www.taste.com.au.

National Health and Medical Research Council

- The National Health and Medical Research Council website provides information about alcohol consumption for Australian adults. The website also includes a downloadable chart which explains how many standard drinks are contained in common servings of alcohol. Visit www.nhmrc.gov.au > Your health > Alcohol guidelines.

The Department of Health and Ageing

- The Department of Health and Ageing website has information on exercise, nutrition and healthy eating, and maintaining a healthy weight, including a tool that calculates your BMI. Visit www.health.gov.au > For consumers > Education and prevention > Nutrition and physical activity.

Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)

- The Dietitians Association of Australia website allows you to search for an accredited practicing dietitian in your area. Visit www.daa.asn.au.

Exercise diary

Keeping track of the exercise you complete in a diary may help to keep you motivated as you will be able to see, at a glance, what you have achieved. Remember, if you don't achieve your exercise goals, for whatever reason, this is not a failure. Try focusing on exercise that you did complete as a success, and gradually work your way towards meeting your goals. To download a diary with additional space to record your exercise, visit www.bcna.org.au > Living with breast cancer > Physical wellbeing > Exercise & staying fit.

Week 1			
	Type of exercise	Intensity of exercise	Amount of exercise
<i>(Example)</i> Monday	<i>Walking</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>30 minutes</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			
TOTAL			
Week 2			
	Type of exercise	Intensity of exercise	Amount of exercise
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			
TOTAL			

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Living well after breast cancer trial, being conducted by the Cancer Prevention Research Centre, in the School of Population Health at the University of Queensland, with funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council.

My advice to other women is don't be too hard on yourself. The surgeries, healing, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and all the other little bumps in the road on this journey set us back, take its toll and put a barrier up between us and exercise. You will get there eventually, and slowly, slowly build back up to what feels comfortable for you. – Michele

I exercised just about every day through chemotherapy, walking or light gardening, except on what I call the 'desperate days' at the end of chemotherapy. It most definitely helped me. Even now, four years later, I can control my lymphoedema (having had 40 lymph nodes removed), largely with a regular exercise regime. It seems to make sense really. – Anthea

Ann's story

BCNA Member

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 2008 at the age of 63, and had a lumpectomy, axillary clearance, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I was referred to a lymphoedema clinic as my arm swelled quite a bit, and I was fitted with a compression garment to control the swelling. I was also referred to a physiotherapist who introduced me to an innovative new program especially for breast cancer patients. The program aims to help cancer patients get back to their full strength after finishing their treatment, through exercise and hydrotherapy.

I joined with a friend who had also recently finished breast cancer treatment. We really loved our gym sessions and mostly attended three times a week. The gym training helped us understand how much exercise we could do without tiring ourselves too much, or overdoing things at this early stage of our recovery. It was such fun meeting the other participants who had all gone through a similar experience to us, and it provided great support for us all.

When the course finished I decided it was time to join my local gym, and continue the exercises to keep building my strength. Luckily my gym has a pool so I started swimming laps, which I hadn't done since I left school some 45 years ago! I also do aqua aerobics, and both have really helped my lymphoedema in my arm, so that for the last two years I have not had to wear a compression sleeve on my arm except for long flights. My radiologist has told me that swimming and exercising in the pool are really helpful as the water acts like a gentle massage.

The aqua aerobic classes are great fun and I would recommend them to anyone, as exercises in the water are easy on your joints and you can set your own pace. The classes are also a great way to meet new friends, and if you can find an early morning class, it is a great way to start your day.

Exercise has made such a difference to my life, and getting fitter has given me so much more energy and focus to enjoy life to the full.





Bakers Delight
We're for real.



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