

# Navigating Physical Activity With Cancer

EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOLLOWING A DIAGNOSIS OF CANCER

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## Why we did this study

Physical activity is beneficial for people following a diagnosis of cancer. However, many people reduce their physical activity during treatment and have difficulty taking it up again. We wanted to gain a more nuanced understanding of the personal experiences of physical activity post-diagnosis to inform how we might work with people to better support their activity engagement.

## How we did this study

- We spoke to people with a diversity of cancer types up to 5 years post-diagnosis
- We explored their experiences of physical activity following their diagnosis and what they perceived to help or hinder their participation

## Interviewed 25 Adults



Aged 33 - 84



10 Male



15 Female

## What we found

**We identified five inter-related themes reflecting cancer survivors experience of navigating physical activity following diagnosis**

### A sense of isolation

People felt isolated, abandoned and on their own after discharge. This feeling was exacerbated by the highly medicalised process and lack of explicit and tailored information about living life after cancer.

### A sense of dis-ease

Many people reported disruption to their sense of self and identity. People felt fatigued, fragile, self-conscious, and lacked trust and confidence in their body.

### The meanings people ascribed to physical activity

Physical activity was valued for enhancing well-being, protecting recurrence, supporting re-engagement in meaningful life roles, and as a symbol for getting on with life.

### The importance of others

People relied heavily on others for advice, guidance and encouragement. Health professionals were critical in helping them to know what, when, and how much activity was safe to do.

### Becoming acclimatised

People gradually made adjustments to their everyday activities as they learned to live with the residual impact of cancer and related treatments.

## What you can do



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Read Checklist

## Checklist:

- Recognise your role in helping people navigate physical activity following cancer
- Keep physical activity on the agenda when working with people post-diagnosis
- Provide clear and tailored advice about appropriate and safe activity type, intensity and frequency across the continuum of care
- Discuss possibilities for referral to cancer-specific rehabilitation services
- Take the time to listen and hear people's needs, preferences, fears and concerns about physical activity and meet them where they are at
- Get to know and tap into the personally meaningful representations of physical activity