



Dragonfly Angel Wings - Newsletter

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE

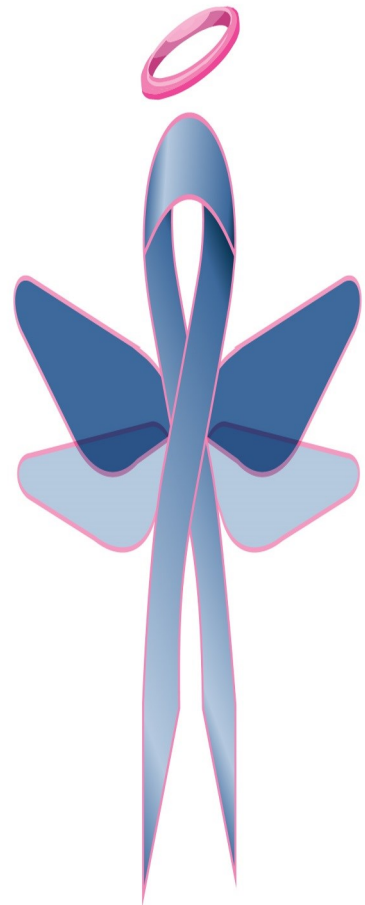
BY: CAROL MICHAELS

Our friend Carol Michaels is back to share more tips for working exercise into our lives and the best practices to incorporate exercise during and after cancer treatment.

Cancer survivors often face unique challenges regarding exercise, either during their cancer treatment or in the months and years after their treatment is concluded. Exercise and fitness training have special benefits for patients during and after treatment for cancer. A well-designed program can decrease side effects and improve quality of life. During chemotherapy, studies have indicated that exercise may increase fitness and energy levels, improve mood, and help patients better tolerate cancer treatments. After treatment is concluded, exercise can increase strength and aerobic capacity, improve joint flexibility, elevate mood, and assist with resumption of regular activities and work demands. In addition, exercise has been shown to decrease the risk of onset or recurrence of many types of cancer. Exercise is not only safe for breast cancer survivors, but it can also improve overall health and long-term survivorship

It is necessary to review the exact nature of the treatments that the patient is undergoing in order to understand the potential side effects of the treatments. This way an exercise plan can be created relative to the patient's unique situation. The particular surgery, treatments, fitness level and healing speed will guide the progression of exercises.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Spring is in the air and that makes us happy as well as, yep, you guessed it—GRATEFUL!! So, would there be any doubt that this month we once again focus on GRATITUDE? This is one of our favorite topics and one we can't get enough of.

This month's newsletter features another fabulous article by our friend Carol Michaels who will talk about how important exercise is.

And, with spring's arrival, what better time to start to exercise? Also, we share more of our journaling ideas, as well as share the story of a wonderful writing talent who also happens to be a cancer survivor.

Happy spring to all! Enjoy the weather and watch for those blossoms getting ready to show their colors. Until next time—here's to moments of acceptance, believing and conquering!

What do you want to see in a cancer survivorship website? Go to www.dragonflyangelsociety.com and tell us what you think!

THE FLUTTER—APRIL JOURNALING

As many of you know, we started to post monthly journal prompts. The response has been very positive and we thank you for that! We thought we would add a little taste of our journaling ideas each month within The Flutter. The month of April is a focus of gratitude. This is an easy word BUT filled with plenty of meaning. I have just started to adapt my own gratitude practice by

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- When times are tough I am grateful...
- Sometimes being grateful gets me through.....
- List 3 things a day that you are grateful for....
- Being grateful allows me to....
- I can my express gratitude by....

simply writing down three things I was grateful for at the end of each day. Honestly, I didn't think I would get much out of this but what a surprise!!! I actually gained more than I could have imagined from it, and it truly helps in my day to day. Here is a taste of our April journaling. What do you think? If you are willing, share your thoughts with the #freedomflutter. Write away!

NAVIGATING THE CANCER MINEFIELD—BY SAM

I was 22 years old when my cancer story began. It was January 2010, and not a great start to what would be a year to remember for all the wrong reasons.

I'd had rectal bleeding for most of the night, that didn't seem to want to stop, so after visiting the doctor I was sent to hospital to have four pints of blood put back in me. The man who would become my consultant examined me and said I had a polyp, which is a sort of wart-like growth, which may or may not be benign. Fast forward a month or two and I was back in hospital having it removed. A few months later I would be back having an MRI and a colonoscopy, the latter revealing 18 more polyps. One or two of them contained cancerous cells. That August I had my colon removed and I spent the next five months with a colostomy bag. In January 2011 I had the colostomy reversed and an internal pouch was created – this is basically a makeshift large intestine made out of part of the small intestine. Both having the colostomy bag and then living without it took a lot of getting used to.



After my operations, my parents and I had a meeting with a genetic counsellor who encouraged us to get tested to see if there was a genetic cause for my cancer. It turned out we have Lynch syndrome, which is an inherited gene that runs through families and can make us more likely to get certain types of cancer.

Because of Lynch syndrome, I have to have check-ups every year to make sure I'm still okay. At the moment this means I have a gastroscopy (camera down the throat and into the stomach) and a flexible sigmoidoscopy (similar to a colonoscopy) every year. Until recently I also had to have an annual CT scan.

Those are the cold medical facts, but of course they are not the whole story. There is so much more I could rattle on about, from losing trust in my body, to feeling anxious every time I go for a check-up, to fear of recurrence, to sharing my feelings with friends and family. Cancer is an emotional minefield! The main way I deal with it is by writing – I write poetry and I also have a blog where I know I can spill my guts in a safe, non-judgemental environment. Hearing from other cancer survivors online is also really helpful – just to know other people feel the same way and can empathise!

If I could tell my 22 year old self anything, I'd probably tell her to not expect it all to be over once treatment ends. Because these days I sometimes think I feel worse about everything now than I did when it was all happening to me. There are certainly more good days than bad, but I allow myself to have bad days, and I try to be kind to myself. One thing having cancer has taught me is that I should do all the things I want to do, be impulsive and spontaneous, and make things happen for myself. Now "I'll do it one day" is not good enough for me, because I know if I don't make plans, "one day" might never come.

Sam Rose is a 29 year old poet, writer, and colon cancer survivor. She lives in England with her partner and in her spare time she enjoys writing and listening to music. You can find her on Twitter @writersamr, and at her website <http://www.writersam.co.uk>.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormonal therapy have unique and potentially debilitating side effects, which exacerbate the problems faced by cancer patients. Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation can also increase the risk of developing lymphedema. Surgery can create adhesions that can limit range of motion, and cause pain, numbness and tightness. Removal of lymph nodes creates scars and may decrease range of motion.

Chemotherapy may affect balance, a patient's immune system, and cause nausea, light-headedness, vertigo, fatigue, sarcopenia, and anemia. Systemic treatments such as chemotherapy and hormonal therapy as well as targeted, biological and immunotherapies may impact balance, cardiac function, and the gastro-intestinal tract. Furthermore, they may lead to neuropathy or numbness in the extremities.

Breast cancer patients are often on hormonal therapy. Common medications such as aromatase inhibitors (post-menopause) and Tamoxifen can lead to weight gain, joint pain, muscle pain, and other menopause-related symptoms including loss of bone density. Other treatments for breast cancer, such as Herceptin, may have side effects that need to be reviewed with the patient's doctor.

Radiation can cause fatigue, tightness, and stiffness and increases the risk of lymphedema. It can also cause swelling and burning of the skin.

Cancer surgery and treatments affect the entire body, not just the area of the cancer. Everyone has different reactions to the treatments. Sometimes the effects become apparent after the treatment is finished. Some symptoms can appear years after treatment, particularly lymphedema.

When can a cancer survivor start an exercise program after having cancer surgery and treatments? Relaxation breathing can be performed immediately after surgery and soon after stretching exercises as soon as he or she receives medical clearance. A stretching program will restore mobility in the chest and back that allow for freer movement of the lungs and diaphragm. Strength training needs to be performed twice a week especially since there may be an increased risk of developing osteoporosis. Aerobic exercise should be performed daily. It can be broken up into 10-minute segments, which can be helpful if suffering from fatigue.

A medical history, base line range of motion and girth measurements, and a general fitness assessment should be taken. At the start of an exercise program for breast cancer, shoulder flexion, extension, abduction and rotation measurements are recorded. In an ideal situation it is helpful to take these measurements prior to the surgery. This provides a basis of comparison.

It is also a good idea to meet with a lymphedema therapist if at risk for lymphedema. This way the lymphedema therapist can take limb girth measurements. These can be used as a basis of comparison if there is suspicion of lymphedema. A lymphedema exercise program is not only safe for those with lymphedema, it also decreases the risk of flare-ups.

Many variables determine the exercises that are effective and safe. Every day will bring new challenges and new accomplishments for the cancer survivors. It is important to be able to modify the exercises to fit the needs at any given time. Both healing times and pain tolerance can differ greatly from one person to another. Speed of recovery depends on the pre-surgery fitness level and type of surgery and treatments.

Some tips

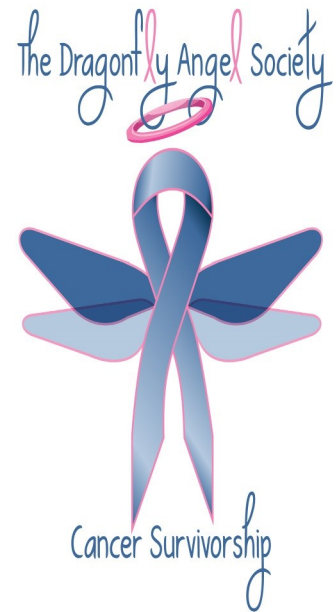
- Pain and fatigue levels can also change from day to day, and even from hour to hour. You may wake up feeling fine, but may have increased fatigue as the day progresses. Track the energy levels throughout the day to determine the best time to schedule the exercise sessions. Exercise when energy levels are high. For example, if you have more energy in the afternoons, you should schedule time to exercise in the afternoons.
- Common sense and "listening to your body" are of utmost importance. You should not feel like you have to follow a rigid protocol or a strict schedule. A routine must be customized due to the numerous physical and psychological side effects you may be experiencing.
- Cancer survivors should incorporate aerobic exercise, strength training, stretching, posture and balance into their exercise routine. Exercise that focuses on functional fitness will help you to be able to perform the activities of daily living and return to the activities that you enjoy. For those who were active prior to surgery it is imperative to slowly work back up to your previous level of activity. It is not wise to go back to a gym and continue with a pre-cancer exercise routine. Be patient; returning to your pre-cancer fitness level will take time and should not be rushed.
- Find programs, either individual or small group, that will help you to achieve your goals in a warm, friendly setting. The camaraderie and support of a small group can make taking care of your health enjoyable, fun and act as a support group.
- Once you start to exercise and have less pain, stiffness and more energy, you will be motivated to continue. Cancer survivors say that engaging in an exercise program is empowering and gives them a sense of control and accomplishment. Remember, the goal is to stay healthy, have fun and be safe. Enjoy the road to recovery!

Carol Michaels is the founder and creator of Recovery Fitness®, an exercise program designed to help cancer patients recover from surgery and treatments. Carol received her degree from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. She is certified by The Cancer Exercise Training Institute, American Council on Exercise, American College of Sports Medicine, Pilates certified, and is a member of ACSM and IDEA.

You can find out more about her and the programs she offers at: www.carolmichaelsfitness.com & www.recoveryfitness.net

GRATITUDE.

“The real gift of gratitude is that the more grateful you are, the more present you become.” -Robert Holden



What do you want to see in a cancer survivorship website? Go to www.dragonflyangelsociety.com and tell us what you think!

The Dragonfly Angel Society

7316 Hartford Rd
Downers Grove, IL 60516

www.dragonflyangelsociety.com

E-Mail: dstewart@dragonflyangelsociety.com
[sstewart@dragonflyangelsociety.com](mailto:ss Stewart@dragonflyangelsociety.com)

