The 7 Surprising Benefits of Exercise for Kidney Cancer Patients

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Kidney Cancer and Exercise

We've long known that exercise is a boon to our health – it improves cardiovascular strength, builds musculature, reduces insulin resistance, and *just makes you feel good.*

And it does so many other things.

But what about its effect on cancer patients – especially kidney cancer?

How Does Exercising Help Kidney Cancer Patients?

According to *Kidney Cancer Canada*, having an exercise routine, in general, may prevent kidney cancer from occurring.

But what if you have been diagnosed with kidney cancer? How can exercise help? Well, exercise actually can help with improving several aspects of life, including:

- Reduced fatigue.
- Improved sleep quality.
- Improved physical function.
- Improved overall quality of life.

Kidney Cancer Canada also performed an international literature review and found that a "physically active lifestyle and formal exercise program can help relieve cancer-related fatigue, muscle weakness, thromboembolism (blood clots), weight gain, loss of bone density, improve quality of life, and reduce psychological distress. In addition, exercise may actually slow the progression of some cancers and reduce the risk of overall death from cancer, as well as reducing the probability of relapse."

Due to these overwhelming findings, there is now research to evaluate the biochemical basis for exercise. Experts believe that exercise is a great adjuvant therapy after surgery.

The Role of Exercise as a Kidney Cancer Survivor

The American Cancer Society notes that, for most cancers, there is very little evidence in regards to lifestyle changes to reduce the likelihood of the cancer returning. Why? Because this is an area that has not been well studied.

However, experts do believe that exercise has its place in reducing cancer recurrence for most types of cancer in general. Although if you're recovering from a grueling fight with kidney cancer and you're likely fatigued, adding in exercise (if you haven't been already!) will likely make you feel at least a *little* bit better!

The benefits of an exercise routine are multifaceted:

- It improves cardiovascular fitness.
- It may help you lose or maintain your weight.
- It improves musculature.
- It may reduce fatigue and give you energy.
- It can reduce anxiety and depression.
- It can make you happier and feel better about yourself.
- It *may* help prevent the recurrence of cancer.

Kidney Cancer and Exercise: Before You Begin…

You may want to jump right in and begin exercising. And, you may be able to do that! But hold on before you begin!

First, regardless of the stage of kidney cancer you're in – treatment or survivor – take a self-evaluation. Have you previously been physically active? Yes? Was it recently? Or no, you have not been active before?

If you answered no, you have not been active, or yes, but it is has been a while – speak with your physician before beginning your exercise routine. It is also a good idea to clear yourself for exercise if you have had surgery or other comorbid conditions that may prohibit you from exercising, or that will limit your exercise capabilities.

OK good – now that you're ready, or have been cleared by your physician, you're ready to go!

But WAIT! How long should you exercise? And how often? And what the heck should you do?

According to the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, an effective exercise routine should have three components:

1. An aerobic component that gets the heart pumping.
2. A strength training component that builds muscle.
3. A stretching component to keep muscles and joints flexible.

The goal is at least 30 minutes of exercise, five days per week. That may seem like a lot, especially if you haven't been exercising at all. So start small, and work your way up! Start with a 10-minute walk around the block. As you gradually build strength and endurance, increase the amount of time that you can walk. Eventually, you'll be at 30 minutes!

You could also break that 30-minute walk into more manageable chunks by walking 10 minutes three times per day. Doing this may reduce the fatigue that you feel.

Remember, start small if you need to and gradually work your way up – if you attempt to do 30 minutes of exercise, five days per week when your body isn't used to it, you may become fatigued right away and this can cause frustration – which can mean that you'll be less likely to stick with your exercise plan.

And pick an exercise that you enjoy doing. If you used to run to control your weight but hated every minute of it, don't start running again! Choose a different exercise – maybe try dancing this time! Good luck in both your kidney cancer and exercise journey!