Cancer affects everyone differently. Strong scientific evidence shows that keeping active during and after treatment of cancer reduces the loss of vital physical function needed for normal daily activities such as house work, shopping and childcare.¹ Fatigue, a symptom meaning tiredness and lack of energy, is one of the most troubling symptoms of cancer or its treatment. Many people, wrongly believe, that they should store energy by choosing to rest whilst undergoing treatment.³ This worsens physical function and adds to further tiredness.² Many other troublesome symptoms of advanced cancer and its treatment can be reduced in people who remain active too.¹ Activity, during treatment, has been shown to have a positive effect on anxiety and self-esteem.³ Following treatment, quality of life, depression and anxiety is significantly improved in people continuing to be active.¹ Try combining your activity time with family and friends or using it as an opportunity to reflect on things and listen to your favourite music.

Physical Activity Recommendations for inactive adults with Cancer

Cancer and its treatments affect people very differently but trying to avoid inactivity and returning to normal daily activity as soon as possible after surgery and during treatments is advised. Aim to gradually follow the three types of activity:

Aim to do the following three types of activity:

- **Aerobic activity** at relative moderate intensity for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week – one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least five days each week.

- **Muscle strengthening activity** on two or more days a week which work all major muscles groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulder and arms).

- **Flexibility exercises** on a daily basis

Plan your lifestyle change

**Keep it simple:** Don’t make drastic commitments. Choose activities that are easy, simple and enjoyable to maintain.

**Set a goal and monitor:** Set weekly targets that are achievable and keep a record of what you do. If you fail, create barriers to the things that stop you from reaching them.

**Go Public:** Discuss your goals and activities with others to keep you motivated for longer.

See ‘Getting started’ at www.prescription4exercise.com for useful tips on planning your next move.

Do not worry if you struggle to meet the recommendations, because by trying to become more active, you are still gaining some health benefits.
Aerobic activity
Aerobic activity, also known as endurance activity, is when large muscle movements, maintained over a period of time, make the heart and lungs work harder.

Activity Type? – Any type that you can maintain comfortably is ideal. Choose exercises that you enjoy, such as walking, cycling or group fitness classes. Aerobic activities are really important if you want to improve the health of your heart and circulation.

How long (duration)? – You can split your total activity amount into minimum bouts of 10 minutes if needed. If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short daily amounts and increase this as your body allows and you feel more confident. Remember not to sit for hours. A regular break from sitting every hour is healthy.

How hard (intensity)? – Try to progress gradually over time to a relatively moderate-intensity activity. The ‘talk test’ is a simple way to measure moderate intensity. Whilst you are working, you can still talk, but not sing, during the activity. Getting out of breath when increasing your activity level as it is a normal body response to exercise.

How often (frequency)? – if you aim to do 30 minutes per day then do this at least 5 times per week so that you can reach a total of 150 mins a week. Distribute sessions over the week and aim to have no more than 2 consecutive days without physical activity. When you start any new activities make sure you give your body enough time to recover and adapt between sessions.

Muscle Strengthening and Flexibility
Activities that promote strengthening and flexibility are vital for a complete physical activity programme. Being stronger and more flexible helps you to achieve aerobic activities, such as brisk walking or swimming, more successfully. You can find some notes and videos for some simple ‘Strength and Flexibility Exercises’ at www.prescription4exercise.com.

Safety considerations
• Some people, including friends and family are concerned that exercise is harmful during or after treatment but they are rare, mild and similar to people without cancer.¹
• If you have led a very sedentary lifestyle, begin by doing low intensity exercise of short duration, e.g. 10 minutes.
• Stop exercising if you feel dizzy, sick, unwell or very tired.
• See a doctor if you are having chest pain, black outs or breathlessness on mild exertion.
• If you have cancer affecting the bones or you have been told that your bones are weak then avoid high impact or contact activities and speak to your specialist for further advice.
• Progress strengthening exercises in small and gradual increments to prevent lymphoedema (a long term swelling, usually of arms or legs, in cancer). If you have already have lymphoedema, avoid strenuous repetitive exercise in the affected limb and wear a compression garment.
• Some cancer and treatments can increase your chance of falls by increasing dizziness, weakness and loss of sensation in the feet. If this is a new symptom and unexpected then check with your doctor. If not, then carry out balance exercises and avoid activities requiring considerable coordination (e.g. treadmill).

If you have any other long term health conditions, ask your healthcare professional and/or visit www.prescription4exercise for additional useful safety considerations.

References
3. Start Active, Stay Active - a report on physical activity for health from the four home countries. 'Chief Medical Officers. UK Department of Health, July 2011.

Further reading
• ACSM’s Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, American College of Sports Medicine, 2009
• Other useful websites
  www.macmillan.org.uk
  www.cancerresearchuk.org

Visit www.prescription4exercise to learn more about physical activity and how it can prevent and treat many long term conditions.