

Silk rse **WOMEN**

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*Jan Walden, Assistant Executive Director
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BREAST CANCER & EXERCISE

—by Doreen Puglisi, Founder, The Pink Ribbon Program

Breast cancer treatment varies depending on the type and stage of cancer and the age and medical history of the patient. Treatment may include surgery (lumpectomy or mastectomy), chemotherapy, radiation, hormone therapy or a combination of therapies.

Breast surgery frequently results in decreased strength and range of motion of the affected shoulder and arm. About 25-30 percent of women develop lymphedema, an accumulation of excess lymphatic fluid that causes arm swelling. Lymphedema can develop at any time - soon after surgery or radiation or many months to years later.

Side effects from other treatments include fatigue, nausea, pain, difficulty sleeping, lowered self-concept, anxiety and depression. Weight gain is often associated with chemotherapy.

Exercise training is emerging as a complementary treatment, as recent research suggests that exercise is feasible and can help manage negative psychological and physiological side effects associated with cancer. Women should discuss any exercise program with their physician and be screened to ensure safety. Fitness assessments should include measurements



of resting heart rate and blood pressure, body composition, strength, flexibility and aerobic capacity.

Most women can start exercising once they have recovered from surgery. Typical goals for women undergoing treatment are to maintain strength, endurance and functional ability and to minimize side effects. Post-treatment goals may shift to improving functional ability and fitness.

Appropriate aerobic activities include walking, biking, rowing, swimming and stationary cardiovascular equipment. Intensity and duration depend on the woman's current health status and exercise capacity.

Resistance and flexibility exercises also are important and should include exercises for the major muscle groups with some additional exercises for the shoulder area.

The shoulder area may have some limitations in range of motion and strength as a result of surgery. Consequently, additional stretching exercises for flexion, abduction and internal and external rotation may be indicated.

The major concern with resistance training of the affected arm and shoulder is its possible role in triggering lymphedema. Consequently, patients are instructed to limit the amount of weight lifted in upper body exercises. Some experts believe that gradual progression of flexibility and resistance exercises can help women regain their normal range of shoulder and arm movement and may help to prevent lymphedema by pumping lymph fluid out of the arm through the undamaged lymph vessels.

It is important for the breast cancer survivor to find an educated fitness professional who has the knowledge and training to work with the conditions and side effects of breast cancer.

You can find more information on exercise for breast cancer survivors at: www.pinkribbonprogram.com

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE DURING AND FOLLOWING TREATMENT:

- Enhanced functional capacity
- Greater muscle strength
- Increased flexibility
- Increased range of motion of the affected shoulder
- Attenuation of weight gain associated with chemotherapy
- Enhanced psychological well-being
- Decreased fatigue associated with chemotherapy and radiation therapy
- Less incidence of nausea during chemotherapy
- Improved sleep patterns
- Improved quality of life

CANCER FACT

One in every nine women will develop breast cancer during her lifetime. Early stage breast cancer has an excellent prognosis, with a five-year survival rate of over 90 percent. Currently, greater than two million women in North America are breast cancer survivors.

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