

Road to Recovery: Fitness helps fight fatigue

Like hordes of people nationwide, Terry Gratkowski of Mt. Pleasant, Mich., walks and strength trains regularly as part of her fitness regimen. But Terry isn't jumping on (or falling off) the fitness bandwagon. She uses physical activity to help take control of her cancer – and take back control of her life.

Though exercise and cancer treatment may seem like a paradox, oncology rehabilitation professionals at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® make physical activity part of patients' integrated plans to help improve their quality of life and better tolerate treatments.

Terry, who underwent surgery followed by weeks of radiation for soft tissue sarcoma, is committed to a fitness program to lessen fatigue and rebuild muscles in her legs...muscles that she hopes will help her cross the line of the Susan G. Komen 3-Day For the Cure this August, just a year after her diagnosis.

Terry met with her physical therapy team to set up a program for her to follow during treatment and at home to promote strength and endurance. As part of her program, Terry does strength training with resistance bands. She also plans on walking three miles a day.

The most common side effects of cancer treatment are exhaustion and fatigue. A cancer patient's energy is depleted by treatment. They often do not feel encouraged to stay active and feel they need to rest. But the less activity they do, the more fatigued they will become.

"Walking was the best part of my day and I want to get back to that. My physical therapist showed me how to use the bands. They are giving me a lot of ongoing support even when I'm not at the hospital," says Terry.

Recent research has confirmed that patients who remain active and utilize exercise as a component of cancer treatment enjoy a higher quality of life than those who don't. Stretching is a vital component of total physical fitness with numerous benefits.

Benefits of Stretching

- Enhances performance in everyday activities
- Improves mobility and independence
- Maintains and improves posture and muscle balance
- Improves performance in recreational and sporting activities
- Prevents injury
- Reduces post-exercise muscle spasms
- Assists in relieving joint stiffness and pain
- Promotes physical and mental relaxation