

## BMDA Improving Your Cancer Care

### What You Can Do

A healthy lifestyle and behavior changes can support cancer treatments and help you feel better. They may also improve your response to treatment. To improve your health and well-being, try the following.

#### Eat Well

Nutrition and balanced food choices play an important role during your cancer treatment and survivorship. A healthy diet can help you manage side effects, recover quicker and improve outcomes. It may also lower your risk of future cancer.

#### Plant-Based Diet

- Eat at least 2 ½ cups of non-starchy vegetables and fruits a day. Choose a variety of colors and ways to cook.
- Eat fiber-rich foods, such as whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds. Whole vegetables and fruits have more fiber, less sugar and less salt than juices.
- Limit eating red meat (beef, pork, lamb, goat, veal and bison) to less than 18 ounces per week. If you eat meat, choose fish or poultry. Plant-based proteins, such as beans, are a healthy alternative. Try not to eat high fat and processed meats such as sandwich meats, hot dogs, sausages, bacon and salami.



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#### Choose Healthy Fats that Support Your Body

- Include omega-3 and monounsaturated fats in your daily diet. Good sources are olive and canola oil, olives, walnuts, chia seeds, flaxseed, avocado and cold water fish, such as salmon, trout, halibut and tuna.
- Limit saturated fats and excess omega-6 fatty acids. These are found in high fat dairy products (whole milk, cheese and butter), fatty meats, margarine, corn oil and fried foods.
- Avoid trans fats that are found in packaged snack foods, fried foods and shortening. Avoid foods with “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” listed on the food label.

#### Change Unhealthy Eating Habits

- Manage portion sizes; learn to identify when you feel hungry and when you feel full.
- Eat less salty foods and foods processed with salt. Limit salt to less than 2,400 milligrams of sodium (1 teaspoon) a day.
- Limit high calorie, low nutrient foods such as sodas, fruit flavored drinks, candy and sweets. Choose fruit or dark chocolate in a small portion as an alternative to sweets.

- Limit refined “white” foods, such as white bread, sugar and rice where processing has removed fiber, vitamins and minerals. Try to make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains.
- Avoid alcohol. If you do drink, limit alcohol to no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women. A drink serving is 12 fluid ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80 proof distilled alcohol (hard liquor).

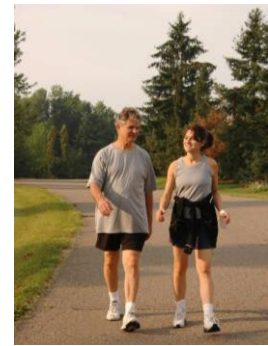
## Exercise

Exercise during and after cancer treatment can help fight fatigue, weight gain and loss of strength and fitness. In addition to regular exercise, try not to spend long periods of time sitting or lying down.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise each week. Moderate activities, like a brisk walk, dancing or gardening increase your heart rate and make you feel a little out of breath. You should be able to talk but not sing. Running, playing basketball or swimming laps are examples of vigorous activity. These make you breathe hard making it difficult to speak.

You should also do strengthening exercise for every major muscle group 2 times a week. These movements are done against resistance.

They include lifting weights or doing pushups or squats. You should use enough weight that you cannot do more than 15 repetitions of a given exercise.



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## Find Balance

### Manage Stress

Stress occurs when the demands on your body or mind exceed your ability to cope with the demands. A demand can be an actual physical danger, like a serious illness. Or it can be more emotional, like a family disagreement.

It is healthy for your body and mind to practice stress management for at least 10 minutes every day. Here are a few tips to manage stress:

- Use relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, meditation and yoga
- Add humor and laughter to your life
- Have quiet time (pray, read, listen to music).



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### Accept Help and Support from Others

A network of people to help and comfort you is important for good health. Having people around who care about you can help you feel better.

Several studies with cancer patients found that patients with the most social support had better quality of life and lived longer than those with the least amount of social support.

Use your support system:

- Ask for help or for a listening ear
- Join a support group that meet your needs
- Be support for others

## **For More Information**

Ask your Baptist MD Anderson oncology team about a referral to our survivorship clinic for consultation to discuss evidence based lifestyle modifications to help reduce your cancer risks.

Adapted from Improving Your Cancer Care: What You Can Do. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center ©2017 Revised 04/2024. Patient Education. BMDA Reviewed 2/21/2025.