

Dive In: The Benefits of Swimming for Cancer Survivors

Cancer survivors have fought the battle of a lifetime. Once treatment is finished, many people find they are searching for ways to get into the groove of life post-cancer. This often involves finding means of feeling physically stronger after completing chemotherapy or radiation treatment, or finding an effective way to cope with the stress of your experience. What many people don't realize is that their perfect solution may already be in the backyard.

Over the last several years, more and more doctors have been praising the effects of physical activity for cancer survivors. While many kinds of fitness routines can help patients during their recovery, swimming in particular has added benefits that most other forms of exercise don't offer. In this guide, you will learn about the many different incentives of swimming post-cancer treatment, both for your physical and emotional health. You will also find information on how to get started as a swimmer, and information on what kinds of activities to try in the pool. Additionally, you will find resources that may be helpful to you as you continue on in your recovery and swim program.

Whether you were a swimmer before your diagnosis or you are brand new to the pool, swimming may offer you physical and emotional benefits that can help you feel healthier and stronger than ever.

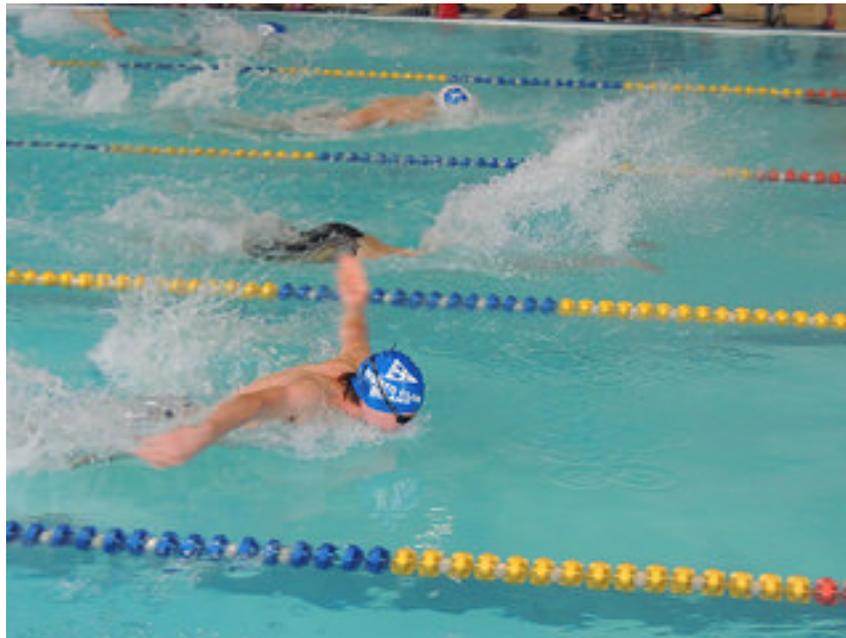


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The Physical Perks of Swimming for Cancer Survivors

Many forms of physical activity can benefit those who have defeated cancer. Swimming offers unique advantages that many other cardiovascular exercises do not because the activity involves so many different muscles, including the heart. The following resources provide useful information on the many physical gains swimming provides for cancer survivors.

[You will burn calories and help control your weight.](#) Additionally, swimming has been shown to lower blood pressure and improve HDL, the “good” kind of cholesterol, while reducing levels of the “bad” kind, known as LDL.

[The US Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion recommends getting 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at least five days a week, and resistance training activities at least two days a week.](#) Swimming has an edge on cardio workouts like running because it has built-in strength training benefits, so you're working several different muscle groups all at once.

[There are many direct physical benefits of swimming that are particularly beneficial to former cancer patients.](#) Some of these include stronger muscles and a healthier heart, both of which may have weakened during cancer diagnosis and treatment; increased appetite, which is especially beneficial for patients who felt too ill to eat during chemotherapy and/or lost a lot of weight; and increased white blood cell production.

[Swimming is the lowest impact form of strength-building and cardiovascular exercise because of the buoyancy of water, meaning your body doesn't have to support its own weight while you work out.](#) This can be good for beginners, especially those who are overweight. The water can also provide the benefit of keeping the swimmer cool during the workout, which can be especially beneficial to someone experiencing side effects like hot flashes from chemo and other cancer treatments.

[Swimming also increases your flexibility due to the range of motions your body experiences as you propel yourself through the water.](#) Flexibility is a key component of the body's overall strength and a critical factor in helping your body recover from cancer and its treatment, especially if your joints have weakened during chemotherapy.

The Mental Health Benefits of Swimming Post-Treatment

Being diagnosed with cancer and undergoing the treatment it requires not only puts your body through pain and stress, but many patients endure an emotional toll as well. Patients – and oftentimes, their families and friends – are burdened with mental trauma along the road to recovery. In addition to improvements to your physique, swimming has been shown to offer psychological benefits. The following resources provide helpful information on the many ways taking a dip can give cancer survivors a mental boost.

[Swimming and other exercises increase blood flow to the brain during and after the activity.](#) This helps your body react to stress in a healthier way, leading to an overall reduction in anxiety. At least one study concluded that [swimming in particular is extremely effective in combating depression.](#)

[In addition to a stronger body, exercise can be a mood and a self-esteem booster and give you more energy.](#) On top of the physical reaction your brain will have from exercise to make you feel happier, your sense of accomplishment from pushing yourself through a swim session can serve as an instant pick-me-up.

[The very act of getting in the pool on a sunny day can provide you with a healthy dose of vitamin D.](#) Studies suggest there is a direct link between intake of the recommended daily amount of vitamin D and a positive mood, and one way to receive this benefit is through sunshine.

[Swimming allows you to focus on your breathing,](#) and cuts down on distractions from the world around you, such as a group fitness instructor telling you what to do during an exercise class. Many people also feel less self-conscious working out in a pool. You have privacy and seclusion you may not get while working out in front of others at a gym.

[Swimming is also a great group activity to share with your family.](#) Swimming together has been shown to strengthen bonds of families. Making a day at the pool a family affair can be an effective way to bring everyone together to cope with the changes the disease presented to all of you. In the same way swimming can give you joy, so can it with your entire family – and a household of delighted hearts makes for a happier home.



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How to Begin a Swimming Workout Regimen

As with any new fitness plan, the first step in beginning your pool adventures is checking with your doctor to make sure he or she feels your body is ready to take on a new challenge. Once you both agree that you are set to go, there are many ways to prepare yourself to dive in and stick with it. The following resources provide informative tips on how to begin your journey and make your swim time effective.

[Make sure you have the right gear.](#) There are swimsuits for both men and women specially designed to make your workout comfortable and effective. Goggles not only protect your eyes, but also grant you the visibility to glide through the pool more confidently.

[Your level as a swimmer – beginner, intermediate or advanced – will determine the best personalized swim program for you.](#) This resource has specific swimming plans for whichever category you fall under, and includes instructions on strength training exercises to try outside of the pool to enhance your swimming routine.

[Part of the challenge of incorporating swimming into your daily life is finding the energy and motivation to do so.](#) This resource provides a list of tips to help you fight fatigue on those days you want to exercise but feel too exhausted to do it. Additionally, it offers a list of tips on how to help you stay devoted to your swimming routine.

[Work on settling into a steady, comfortable pace during each swim.](#) It's more likely that you will be able to work out for the full amount of time you planned on without becoming burnt out. This resource

explains the science behind why your swim sessions can be more effective and comfortable by sticking to a moderate speed.

[If the thought of starting this new journey seems like too much to take on by yourself, you may find the encouragement you need by joining a swim group.](#) Many community centers offer group classes or clubs for adults, but there are also online forums for those who would rather swim in the comfort of their own pools.

[As you advance as a swimmer, you and your physician may decide it's time for you to try more challenging moves in the pool.](#) This resource provides information on the factors you should take into consideration when deciding which swimmer's stroke to try.



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Pool Exercises that Can Help You Achieve Your Wellness Goals

There are several ways to utilize your pool time, whether you aim to become a skilled swimmer, increase your overall health, or simply enjoy the stress relief swimming may provide. You can see positive changes in both your body and your mood even if you choose to start with basic exercises and work your way up to swimmer status. The following resources provide valuable insight on some of the ways to make the most of your trip to the pool.

[There are four major styles of swimming: the backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly stroke, and freestyle stroke.](#) This resource provides information on what each of these are, and detailed information and videos on how to perform them correctly.

[There are many ways to get active in the pool.](#) If you would like to explore some of the benefits aquatic fitness has to offer but don't feel prepared to give swimming a try yet, consider some other options to making the most of your pool time. This resource offers suggestions on some other activities to start with, such as water aerobics or stretching and yoga poses.

[Doctors suggest beginning with a warm up before attempting any type of workout.](#) This usually involves doing activities to increase the heart rate enough to smoothly transition into the actual training session. This resource provides detailed explanations on some exercises you can do to warm up right in the pool.

[Your shoulders will be one of the majorly engaged muscle groups while you swim, so it is vital to warm them up properly before you dive in.](#) This resource provides step-by-step instructions on shoulder exercises to try in the pool.

Additionally, it's important to take the time to strengthen your upper and lower body. Not only will you become healthier overall, but you will see an improvement in your swimming technique. Specialists at the Ohio State University composed two guides on exercises you can do in the pool as a form of resistance training for the [upper body muscles](#) and the [lower body muscle group](#).

Additional Helpful Resources

There are many channels for finding the support you seek even after your cancer treatment is over. Many post-recovery cancer patients find personal success in group or one-on-one counseling sessions, and there are several organizations to help you find the right fit for you. There are also many groups that offer support for swimmers just embarking upon their swim practice and for those at a more advanced level. The following resources provide information on who you can contact for assistance, whether you feel you are still struggling emotionally during remission or you wish to find others who share your passion for the water.

[The American Cancer Society](#) offers many different kinds of support groups that provide financial and emotional aid to cancer sufferers and survivors. This resource will help you find the right group for you, whether you prefer attending local meetings or accessing online support.

[I Had Cancer](#) is an online community of cancer survivors and those still fighting the disease. Members are encouraged to ask questions and provide insight on how to cope with the illness throughout all of its stages.

[Cancer Support Community](#) is an online support forum that has affiliates in nearly every state where members can attend meetings and share their battle stories.

[Most YMCA locations offer swimming lessons for adults and children.](#) Additionally, many have group workout or open swim hours available to members.

There are many [swimming Meetup Groups](#) around the country where enthusiasts meet to discuss their passion and plan swimming events with other local members.

[If you find you truly love swimming and you receive the thumbs up from your oncologist, you may wish to pursue it as a competitive sport.](#) This resource will help you locate a competitive swim club, in which the overall goal of club members is to compete at local or higher levels.

Swimming offers cancer survivors an array of physical and emotional benefits. It's never too late in life to give the sport a try. There are also many resources available to help you get started, keep you motivated, and provide you with alternate options to swimming that will make the most of your pool time. Whether you are looking for a new self-improvement project or would like to return to the more active lifestyle you enjoyed before your treatment, regular trips to the pool may be your ideal solution.