

# Community-Based Exercise Programs for Cancer Survivors

Rita Musanti, PhD, ANP-BC, and Brittany Murley, MSN, RN



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**Background:** Cancer exercise programming in the community has been emerging in response to the increasing numbers of cancer survivors and social factors favoring movement away from a sedentary lifestyle.

**Objectives:** This article examines several community-based exercise programs for cancer survivors as exemplars of successful programs.

**Methods:** The article investigates where the research is leading as technological advances and cloud-based technologies change the fitness landscape. Links to valuable resources for healthcare providers interested in current physical activity recommendations for cancer survivors are also offered.

**Findings:** Accumulating evidence suggests that cancer survivors who engage in an active lifestyle have less fatigue, better quality of life, improved sense of well-being, and, in the case of breast and colon cancers, a reduced risk of recurrent disease.

Rita Musanti, PhD, ANP-BC, is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing and holds the Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Endowed Professorship of Oncology Nursing at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ; and Brittany Murley, MSN, RN, is a PhD candidate at the University of Texas in Tyler and an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the authors, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. Musanti can be reached at [rita.musanti@rutgers.edu](mailto:rita.musanti@rutgers.edu), with copy to editor at [CJONEditor@ons.org](mailto:CJONEditor@ons.org). (Submitted August 2016. Revision submitted September 2016. Accepted for publication September 28, 2016.)

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Early diagnosis and more effective treatments have resulted in increasing numbers of cancer survivors in the United States, with 3 million survivors in 1971 increasing to more than 15.5 million in 2016 (American Cancer Society, 2016). About 20 million survivors are predicted to be alive in the United States in 2026 (American Cancer Society, 2016). As the number of cancer survivors has grown, so too has the focus on survivorship care, which is now an important subspecialty of cancer care. A component of this care is maximizing physical fitness, an often sought-after goal during and after cancer treatment. Physical fitness is achieved when one engages in physical activity routinely and with intention (usually referred to as exercise, but the term *physical activity* is often used interchangeably). In this article, the authors will discuss the following questions regarding community-based exercise programs for cancer survivors: (a) How have we arrived here? (b) What are some examples of successful community programs? and (c) How do we leverage what we have learned from these programs and

exercise research to develop more effective programming for cancer survivors?

## Background

Exercise recommendations for cancer survivors are commonly highlighted in educational documents and on the websites of many cancer support organizations. These presentations speak to the current recommendations regarding exercise and cancer survivors. But how were these recommendations generated? Concurrent to the evolution of cancer survivorship care was the emergence of the fitness movement, which started in the 1970s (see Dalleck [2012] for a review on the history of physical fitness). In general, the modern movement was a byproduct of two observations: (a) American adults and children were physically unfit (Kraus & Hirschland, 1954) and (b) sedentary behavior caused hypoactive metabolic and cardiovascular disease (Morris, Heady, Raffle, Roberts, & Parks, 1953). Therefore, activities, such as jogging, aerobics, yoga, and Zumba, became fitness