

**KIA KORIKORI  
WHAIMURI I TE  
MATE PUKUPUKU  
GETTING ACTIVE  
AFTER CANCER**



# Getting Active

*'I was a very active person and it has taken some time to build back up the strength that I used to have.'*

Young person

## Why do I need to get moving?

There are many reasons to exercise and many of them have long lasting benefits.

**Less Pain.** Doing the right type of exercise for your body can improve range of motion and decrease stiffness and joint pain caused by treatment side effects.

**Increased Energy.** If you remain active and make an effort to do some exercise (even if it is the last thing you feel like doing), this can increase your stamina and energy levels.

**Weight Maintenance.** Exercise can help you return to a healthy weight, which in turn can help lower the risk of other health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart issues.

**Positive emotional wellbeing.** Getting regular exercise can decrease stress and improve your confidence. Exercise helps you sleep, gives you more energy and releases endorphins (happy hormones) which help to make you feel good. It's a win win!

## Is it safe for me to return to exercise after cancer?

A big question many cancer survivors ask with exercise is **where do I start?** There is a lot you can do, however if you're worried talk to your health care team for advice in case there are limitations or restrictions you need to consider.

## I was really active and playing high-level sport. Will I be able to return to that level of fitness?

As everyone's cancer recovery is different, it's best to check in with your healthcare team or get an assessment from a physio or personal trainer. This will help you set a realistic pace for your current abilities. Once you have built up strength, you can reset your goals to your optimum fitness level.

## Practical things to consider when you return to exercise:

**Low blood counts.** If your haemoglobin (Hb) counts are low, there may not be enough oxygen flow in your body, and exercise may cause you to faint or feel breathless. Avoid over-exerting yourself until your counts return to normal.

**Low platelet counts.** These increase the risk of bruising and bleeding. Avoid contact sports and high-risk sports like skateboarding or mountain biking if your platelets are low.

**Surgery and/or physical limitations.** If you have had surgery or have body modifications, your surgeon will have given you some guidance on the type of exercise that is appropriate. For example, if you have metal-ware in your legs, they may suggest avoiding contact sports or high-risk activities that can cause injury or affect the bones or joints. Make sure you ask about alternative options.

**Pain.** If you have had a period of inactivity, returning to exercise will stretch your muscles in places that you will definitely notice. Rest, or reduce the intensity or time you exercise. If you're getting constant pain that doesn't go away or unusual pain at rest, contact your healthcare team, physio or specialist.

## Where can I go for support?

Before beginning any kind of exercise programme, seek advice and support from your medical team, your AYA Key Worker or physiotherapist.

**PINC & STEEL** are a charity providing Cancer rehabilitation physiotherapy across Aotearoa. Physiotherapists assess each person individually and treatment may include:

- Individualised exercise programs
- Online or in person group classes
- Education on the prevention and early detection of common treatment-related issues
- Support with positive healthy lifestyle behaviours.

**PINC & STEEL:**  
 To access PINC & STEEL you can refer yourself via their website [www.pincandsteel.com](http://www.pincandsteel.com) or ask your AYA Key Worker or healthcare team to refer you. PINC & STEEL also have funding available to help with the cost of your appointments.

*‘Nothing is impossible. If you want something hard enough then go get it, you just have to put in a lot of work to get there.’*

Anna Steven

## PARALYMPIC RUNNER ANNA STEVEN

*‘I had two choices – either have an operation which would leave me unable to walk without constant pain, or have amputation surgery.’*

At age 13 Anna Steven endured six months of chemotherapy and major surgery that led to the amputation of her leg but she didn't let that stop her. In 2021 Anna represented New Zealand at the Paralympics.

It was 2013, and I had been diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer and because I wanted to lead as normal a life as possible, I elected to have an amputation. It still wasn't easy. The chemotherapy knocked me around and then, after the swelling had eased, I had to get used to walking with a prosthetic leg. But, it also meant I learned how to overcome challenges, to focus on a goal, and to make the most out of every day. I kept telling myself that my life was what it was and I couldn't really change it.



# Top tips to get moving

**Warm up before you start.** 2 to 3 minutes of gentle movement before exercise can help your muscles relax and prevent injury. Try shoulder shrugs, lifting your arms overhead, touching your toes, marching, and knee lifts. For the maximum benefit, hold your stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and then relax.



Check out [www.TrekStock.com](http://www.TrekStock.com) under the EXERCISE section for online exercise videos including stretching and core muscle building. The exercises are free, easy to follow and have been developed specifically for young people with cancer.

**Start with light exercise.** Try a hikoi plan. As you get used to walking each day, you can build up to longer walks. You can also alternate the intensity of your walk: for example, walk briskly for a few minutes, slow down, then walk briskly again, until you have done 30-minutes of brisk activity or divide the activity into three 10-minute sessions a day or set an exercise goal like the 5k challenge. Check out the plan for how to increase exercise gradually to build up your fitness.



Monitoring the number of steps you take each day is an easy way to increase your physical activity. Experts recommend 10,000 steps a day - start at a level that suits you and work up.

**Use a fitness tracker.** Fitness wearables like watches and pedometers can motivate you and places like \$2 Discount Stores sell basic versions.

**Exercise when you have energy.** If you lack energy in the evening, consider exercising in the morning. Doing a little bit of exercise can actually give you more energy.

**Try exercise that increases your flexibility and range of motion in your joints.** Yoga, dance or fitness classes are great, as is swimming, cycling or any sport like tennis, basketball, or volleyball, which can help to build strength.



**Try resistance or light weights to help build strength.**

This reverses weakness and keep your muscles and bones strong, so you can go about your daily activities easily.



Get advice about strength training and what's required or join gym classes and access trainers who can help you increase your intensity. Check out Trekstock for more online exercise clips.

## But, I just don't have time to exercise!

Stop thinking of exercise as something you have to do, and incorporate it into your daily activities. **Sitting less** helps make your muscles, bones and joints strong.

**Take regular breaks** - if you're at work or studying, for every 30 mins of screen time take a 5-minute break and do some

stretches. Set a timer on your phone to remind you.

**Exercise to your favourite tv show** - got enough floor space in front of the telly? Do some stretching while you are enjoying your favourite show.

### WEEK 1

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY

### WEEK 2

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY

### WEEK 3

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
20 MINUTE WALK

### WEEK 4

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 0.5 KMS



### WEEK 5

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 0.5 KMS

### WEEK 6

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 1.5 KMS

### WEEK 7

10 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 3 KMS

### CELEBRATE

Well done. Now Plan  
your next walk.

### WEEK 10

15 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 5 KMS

### WEEK 9

15 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 4.5 KMS

### WEEK 8

15 MINUTES  
EVERYDAY + ONE  
EASY WALK - 3.5 KMS



## Make exercise fun

Let's face it, if you can't find a type of exercise you enjoy, then you're probably not going to do it! Try making it fun:

**Get creative.** Try something new like hip-hop or hula dancing, tai chi, surfing, yoga, or an outdoor boot camp.

**Get your whānau, colleagues and mates involved.** Head down to the local courts and shoot some hoops, throw a frisbee or play backyard cricket. Find an exercise buddy who is keen to get fit and improve their exercise regime with you. Set daily step goals, tautoko (support) each other or start some healthy competition.

**Use your phone.** Make an exercise playlist or check out a podcast while you are moving. Use the free health or fitness apps to keep track of your steps. One phone chat with a mate whilst doing moderate exercise and you have done your exercise for the day!

**Set personal goals.** Get motivated by using charts or apps to record movement and track your progress. Treat yourself to something special once you have achieved your goals.

**Try a weekly exercise/movement plan.** Put some time aside in the calendar for exercise each week. See the sample plan or fill in the 6-week movement plan on page 10 to help you get started.

### RECOMMENDED WEEKLY EXERCISE

It is recommended that you do at least **2 ½ hours of moderate** or **1 ½ hours of vigorous physical activity** spread throughout the week. This is equivalent to doing:

- 30 minutes of brisk walking on 5 days per week.
- OR
- Going for a 45 minute run twice per week.

**Moderate intensity** activity causes a slight, but noticeable, increase in breathing and heart rate. With this type of exercise, you can still carry on a conversation. **Some examples of moderate intensity activities are walking, cycling, swimming, stretching, doing pilates, and completing household tasks such as vacuuming.**

**Vigorous intensity** activity makes you out of breath - you cannot do these activities and chat at the same time. **Running, playing sport such as basketball, volleyball, touch, going up stairs, doing high energy classes like dance or box-fit or doing a workout at the gym.**

**Strength Training.** It's recommended that people who've had cancer do resistance exercises (strength training) twice a week. **This is 2 x sets of 12-15 repetitions weekly which is equivalent to bicep curling 2 litre water bottles 15 times a week (30 bicep curls in total). Carrying heavy shopping bags and doing yoga also count.**

## How much exercise should I be building up to?

Check out the chart below for guidance.

	<b>Be Active</b> Keep your heart and mind healthy 		<b>Build Strength</b> Strengthen muscles, bones and joints 	<b>Improve Balance</b> Also builds strength 
How often?	150 minutes of moderate activity a week	OR 75 minutes of vigorous activity a week	2 days a week	2 days a week
	WALK 	RUN 	GYM 	DANCE 
	CYCLE 	SPORT 	DANCE 	YOGA/PILATES 
	SWIM 	STAIRS 	WEIGHT 	SURFING 

**Sign up to events.** Do a walk or fun run, put a team for triathlon or waka ama together, sign up to cycling or swimming events.

**Incorporate exercise into your daily life.** Mow the lawn, wash the car, or walk the dog. These activities use several muscle groups and with some music can be an enjoyable way to get stuff done and exercise at the same time.

**Swap in exercise.** Park your car in the farthest parking space and walk to the building, use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator, or get off the bus several stops early and walk. Allow time in your day for exercise in between work and home.

**Create or find a good exercise space.** This could be at home or in the backyard. Make sure you have everything you need. Yoga mats are great for stretching and are affordable. Some public parks also have strength-training equipment you can use free. Home gym equipment can be hired or bought from large retailers or sports shops.



YouTube has a variety of free, at home workout videos such as yoga, dance and cardio. See the resources section for more info.

**Do what you are comfortable with.** Choose exercise that doesn't make you feel self-conscious - for some it's the gym, for others the pool. Choose people who are up for the same exercise as you, and who you feel comfortable exercising with.

**Incorporate exercise into your holidays.** Aotearoa has many great bike tracks, bush walks, trail rides, lakes and beaches. Try exploring some of these in your next holiday or break. Check out [www.greatwalksofnewzealand.co.nz](http://www.greatwalksofnewzealand.co.nz) and [www.freewalks.nz](http://www.freewalks.nz) for some great walks. If you enjoy orienteering check out [www.orienteering.org.nz](http://www.orienteering.org.nz) for recommendations.



## INTERNATIONAL SURFER AND COACH MATT SCORRINGE

At age 14 Matt represented New Zealand at the International Surfing Association World Junior Titles in Bali, but everything changed in 2009 when - at the age of 24 - he was diagnosed with leukaemia.

"I got home from a tour in Hawaii and eight days later I was having chemotherapy," recalls Matt. "There was really no time to process it or make decisions. I've always been very competitive, so once I was at the hospital, I thought,

*'Well, this is another challenge and I'm going to smash this thing and win it'*

I set a goal of being back and competing in the New Zealand nationals the next year - and, though I still looked like a cancer patient when I got there, it was a stepping stone for my journey back."

After recovering from his illness, Matt decided to follow his passion and use his experience to coach. In 2013 he developed The Art of Surfing and has coached some of NZ's top Olympic surfers along with locals who are keen.

*'I came home with all the knowledge I'd picked up and, after recovering, I sincerely wanted to use that to help our surfers do better'*





### Try a weekly movement plan

Put some time aside in the calendar for exercise each week. See the sample plan below or fill in the 6-week movement plan to help you get started.

This plan has a total time of 2 ½ to 3 hours moderate activity which is the recommendation. If you prefer more high intensity exercise, you can swap this out for 1 ½ hours of high intensity exercise instead.

#### SAMPLE MODERATE WEEKLY MOVEMENT PLAN

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
AM	30 min walk Moderate exercise		Yoga or Trekstock class Strength activity		Yoga or Trekstock class Strength activity		
PM		30 min walk or swim Moderate exercise		30 min walk or swim Moderate exercise			30 min walk or swim Moderate exercise
Time	30 min	30 min	15-30 min	30 min	15-30 min		30 min

**WEEKLY MOVEMENT PLAN**

My physical activity goals are:

I would like to achieve these by:

My barriers to being active are:

My solutions to overcome these barriers are:

Supporters who will help keep me on track are:

Now it's time for you to set some exercise goals.

**ACTIVITY**

Fill in your own Movement Plan

**MOVEMENT PLAN:**  
 Use the template to put some activity into your week. While the first week might be hard, don't give up. Keep going for the next 4 - 6 weeks so you can see the change unfold. Remember to make it fun too!

**WEEKLY MOVEMENT PLAN**

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
<b>Week 1</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							
<b>Week 2</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							
<b>Week 3</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							
<b>Week 4</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							
<b>Week 5</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							
<b>Week 6</b>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
AM							
PM							

Tear or cut out to pop on the fridge ✂

## APPS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

There are a range of apps and online resources to support you to get active. Try them and see how you find them.

### YOUTUBE CLASSES:

**Just Dance.** Follow the dancers on screen and learn steps to your favourite tunes. Get your heart rate up and have fun at the same time.

**Yoga with Adrienne.** If you want to build up your core strength slowly, doing yoga is a great place to start. There are a range of different programmes and intensities to choose from and sessions go from 12 - 30 minutes.

### WEBSITES

**www.trekstock.org.nz** - Enter exercise videos into the search button. These are specifically for young people with cancer and cover a range of different levels and abilities.

### APPS

**Healthmate.** A free Fitness, Activity and Health Tracker app. You can track your progress, and get tips to help you improve over time. Can connect to activity trackers or you can enter manually to help you achieve your goals.

**Apple Health (for iPhone).** A free app that can keep track of your activity, sleep and health data. Can track steps if wearing whilst exercising.

**Samsung Health (for Samsung phones).** A free app to help you with exercise, fitness tracking and wellbeing. Comes with free fitness videos. Track steps whilst exercising and set personal goals.

**Fit on** - A free app giving you access to a range of different exercise programmes that you can watch on your phone, computer or stream to your TV.

### ORGANISATIONS

**PINC & STEEL.** They are qualified cancer rehab physiotherapists who provide support with exercise programmes and physio treatment for young people and adults who have had any form of cancer. If cost is a barrier, you can apply for funding for treatment through their website to receive support for free. **www.pincandsteel.com**

**www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz** Breast Cancer Foundation fund recovery physiotherapy through PINC & STEEL also.

**Green Prescriptions.** You can get a referral through your GP for a green prescription for physical activity classes or gym memberships. There are affiliated providers across Aotearoa. Check out the Manatu Hauora - Ministry of Health website for more info.

**Council Leisure Centres.** Offer discounts for people with community services cards or students and are a cheap way to access the full range of exercise options including pools, gyms and classes.

**www.halberg.co.nz.** The Halberg Foundation provide activity fund grants to help physically disabled young people, aged 5-21 years, to participate in sport and recreation. They fund the adaptation of equipment or the purchase of disability specific equipment, lessons and/or coaching. They also fund support costs for young people to attend a camp including a support person or adapted accommodation.

*Kaua e hoki i te waewae tūtuki, ā, āpā,  
anō hei te upoko pakaru.*

*Do not turn back because of the obstacles  
but press ahead to the desired goal.*

**Self Check In**

Yes / No

I have spoken to my healthcare team about any worries or concerns I have about returning to exercise or staying active

I am aware of available support and organisations to help me reintegrate back into exercise

I am aware of my physical abilities and any limitations I have along with the type of exercise to best support my body

I have set some short-term goals and have asked for support and encouragement from friends and whānau to help me get started

Some of the questions I have for my healthcare team about returning to exercise are:

**Notes**