

MINDFUL MOVEMENT

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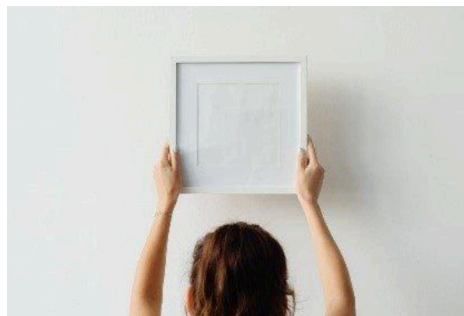
Mindful Movement

What comes to mind when you hear the term “Strength Training”? Many times, people immediately picture dumbbells, weight machines or resistance bands and lots of grunting and/or straining to achieve perfectly formed muscles that look great from any angle. Then, add the many pieces of equipment needed. Finally, figure the correct amount of resistance, repetitions, and sets!

Usually, especially for beginners, starting this type of exercise can be overwhelming and so it becomes easier to do simple aerobic exercise. Taking walks, riding bikes, etc. These are uncomplicated activities that usually have fewer barriers to participation.

But don’t discount the importance of building strength. Focusing on building strength and stamina will help weather the rocky road of treatment and recovery.

Let’s reframe this picture.



Consider the fact that you already move your body against resistance every day. If you replace the equipment, the sets and reps, and the confusion with mindful, bodyweight movements, you can maintain your functional strength with awareness and a simple focus on everyday movements. Climbing stairs, lifting laundry baskets, and raking leaves are just a few examples of daily activities that can become small challenges to our strength. There is more to muscle than just mass. How do we use our muscles? How do they support our posture? Can we save energy by moving more efficiently? Small movements can reap big benefits over time and keep you strong and able-bodied, moving independently... functionally strong.

Research shows that cancer-related fatigue can be mitigated by physical activity. Fatigue limits activity; limited activity leads to de-conditioning; and de-conditioning leads to reduced capacity (a smaller engine). This makes everything harder and even more fatiguing. It can be a negative cycle. If exercise is mindfully paced and balanced with ample recovery time, the cycle of de-conditioning can be reversed. Sometimes our most important tools aren't the weights themselves, but our patience and awareness.

Some of the recent research on cancer and exercise has uncovered the role that resistance training can play in treatment toleration and completion rates, while also contributing to resilience in survivorship. For example, a strong, healthy muscle can better act as a pump for movement of lymphatic fluid and can better create energy. The more a system is used, the more efficient it becomes.

SO, don't overlook the movement and strengthening opportunities that surround you every day.

The Practice of the Day:

Chair Squats

You can consider each time you stand up from a chair or lower down into a chair as 1 repetition if you do it mindfully. Focus on using the muscles that were designed for this movement that we all know as "the squat".



First, sit on the outer edge of a sturdy chair. Plant your hip-width on the floor slightly tucked back below your knees. I use the word “plant” because it’s helpful to feel rooted in the ground for stability.

Sit up straight and cross your hands over your chest or hold your arms straight out in front of your chest if you need more balance assistance. With your gaze remaining forward, slide your seat to the edge of the chair and push through your feet, engaging your legs and stomach to elevate you to a standing position. Ideally, your 2 legs stayed parallel, avoiding your knees bowing out or in.

Now, return to a sitting position by keeping your eyes focused forward (that chair hasn’t moved), and lowering yourself down in a controlled movement. Try not to flop.

Of course, if you have been practicing breathing, you know that breathing will help you focus so try to avoid holding your breath. If you feel confident that you can complete multiple tries of this chair squat, try to do as many as you can before feeling fatigue or failing in your form. That’s a clue to stop.



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Sara Mansfield, MS, NBC-HWC is a Wellness Exercise Specialist for the Healthy Living Program at Mayo Clinic. She holds a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Kinesiology from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is a National Board-Certified Health and Wellness Coach, and is certified through the American College of Sports Medicine as a Certified Exercise Physiologist and a Cancer Exercise Trainer with an Exercise is Medicine® credential. For over 25 years, Sara has worked in a variety of capacities in the health and wellness field, with a specific interest in building lasting healthy lifestyle changes for individuals who have been affected by cancer. Sara’s goal is to expand awareness of the endless possibilities for movement and to make movement accessible to all.

