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**Good Questions**

## Cancer Patients: Move

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Breast cancer survivor Annie Toglia is a leading proponent of recuperative exercise for breast surgery patients. Her book "Staying Abreast: Rehabilitation Exercises for Breast Cancer Surgery" (available from [www.stayingabreast.com](http://www.stayingabreast.com)) is used by some top hospitals and clinics. Toglia recently spoke by phone from her New York home about her experience and efforts.



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### Why is exercise important for breast cancer patients?

Exercise helps lift you from the depression of everything going on. If you can just get up on your feet and walk, you . . . feel more powerful. Exercise also helps remove toxins from the body and prevent lymphedema [swelling after lymph node removal] and frozen shoulder.

### You underwent numerous surgeries after your 1996 diagnosis with stage 4 breast cancer. What problems did you encounter while trying to resume exercise?

I had every common problem from my 16 surgeries and from hunching over in the classic post-mastectomy walk. They include leg swelling, frozen shoulder, and severe back and neck problems.

### How do you start to exercise?

Initially, it's important to focus on deep breathing for pain relief and relaxation. It's helpful to add shoulder rolls and shoulder shrugs.

### Can breast cancer patients undertake a fitness program safely on their own?

Yes, but symptoms such as numbness, tingling, dizziness or nausea are indications to consult a physician.

### How quickly can a breast cancer patient expect to be at her pre-breast cancer fitness level?

Pretty quickly after a lumpectomy, with the approval of a physician or physical therapist. A couple of months after a mastectomy, as long as there are no problems with lymphedema. The better physical condition a woman is in prior to her surgery, the faster the return to pre-surgery condition. I took a 30-minute walk within two weeks of my mastectomy, holding onto parking meters and taking breathing breaks.

-- Rebecca R. Kahlenberg

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