

Four Words for Better Cancer Outcomes: Sit Less, Move More

Cancer survivors benefit from reducing sedentary behavior. These five movement snacks can help keep you active.

December 8, 2025 By Sami Mansfield

Sitting less is just as important as exercising more. Even if you meet daily exercise recommendations, prolonged sitting is linked to worse health outcomes, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

While awareness of the role of physical activity in cancer survivors has increased, reducing sedentary behavior has been less emphasized. Studies indicate that cancer survivors with more sedentary time have worse physical functioning and general health. In other words, higher physical activity levels are linked to better quality of life, while prolonged sitting is associated with poorer outcomes. This is especially the case for people with multiple chronic conditions.

These findings suggest that while reducing sedentary time can potentially add years to your life, short-term improvement is also very attainable with small habit changes, such as daily movement snacks.

Movement snacks are short, planned exercises that last 30 seconds to several minutes. They help activate your muscles, move your joints and get your heart pumping. (For more cancer research on physical activity, see our [feature story](#).)

Sitting less does not mean you must make drastic lifestyle changes. Movement does not require a gym membership or hours of exercise. It's about making small, intentional choices that add up over time. Reducing sedentary time is a simple yet powerful step in a healthy direction. Start with one or two movement snacks that fit into your routine and build from there.

If you're new to this movement technique, here are five ideas to get you started.

- Chair sit-to-stands: In addition to regular standing and moving throughout your day, try to complete as many sit-to-stands as possible within one minute. You can place your hands on your legs or on the arms of the chair if needed, but focus on pressing through your heels, looking forward and standing all the way up for each repetition.

Chair sit-to-stands exerciseDoriot Kim

- Countertop push-ups: This exercise works your upper body and core. Place your hands slightly wider than shoulder width on the edge of a countertop, step one or both feet back and lower your chest to the counter as close to touching as possible. Keep your body in a straight line and press away from the countertop. Do this while waiting for your coffee to brew or your lunch to heat up.

Countertop push-upsDoriot Kim

- Ankle alphabet: Loosen up stiff ankles and feet while reducing fluid buildup in your lower body with this fun exercise. While sitting or lying down, point your toes and imagine drawing each letter of the alphabet in the air. For maximum effect, use big, flowing motions. Once you've finished the alphabet with one foot, switch to the other—don't be surprised if one side feels a bit more challenging than the other.

Doriot Kim

- **March in place:** Turn your sedentary TV time into active time with this movement snack. During commercials or every 30 minutes, march in place for one to two minutes. You can do this standing for a full-body boost or seated if standing isn't an option. Lift your knees as high as comfortably possible and swing your arms to get your blood flowing.

March in place exerciseDoriot Kim

- Step it up: Use a sturdy step or a flight of stairs and step one leg up, then back down, alternating legs for one to two minutes. If you're feeling ambitious, try climbing full flights of stairs at your own pace. For added safety, make sure to have a railing or wall nearby for support, especially if you're new to this movement or have balance concerns.

Step it upDoriot Kim

This article was originally published by the American Institute for Cancer Research. Sami Mansfield, ACSM-CET, is a lifestyle medicine and exercise oncology expert who is passionate about empowering cancer survivors, caregivers and health care professionals with practical, engaging strategies for healthier living. Learn more at [youtube.com/@ShiftWithSami](https://www.youtube.com/@ShiftWithSami).

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