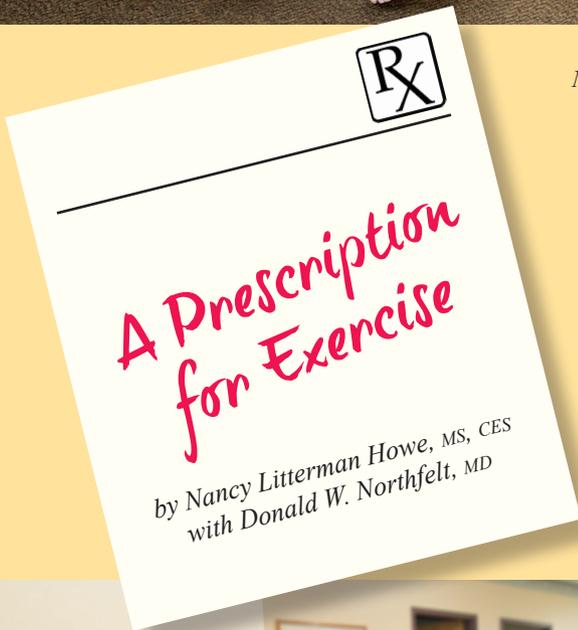




Research proves that, for cancer survivors, regularly exercising for 150 minutes a week can reduce the risk of recurrence, help recover vitality, and potentially thwart side effects like neuropathy and lymphedema. My personal story is a testament to these findings.

In 2000, my story of cancer survival, detailing how I nurtured hope for a strong recovery in the gym, appeared in *Coping* magazine. Aggressive, post-surgery radiation dulled my days with fatigue, but short, gentle workouts returned strength to my muscles and vitality to my body. During this time, fellow survivors inspired me to define the type of life I wanted to live and then embrace it. Feeling stronger physically and mentally, I abandoned my corporate desk job and started working at the gym where I trained every day.

I also returned to school for my master's degree in Exercise and Wellness and eventually joined a team of cancer researchers. In 2013,



Nancy works with cancer survivors Sue DeGroff and Ulla-Britt Withrow, who were referred to her by Dr. Northfelt, at the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center in Scottsdale, AZ.



Nancy Howe and Dr. Donald Northfelt



while collaborating on a breast cancer study, I met oncologist Dr. Donald Northfelt. Over cups of cafeteria coffee, we shared our frustrations with what seemed to be the stalled progress of the oncology field accepting exercise as therapy.

Dr. Northfelt wanted to prescribe exercise, but his hospital had no exercise options for cancer survivors. He balked at the idea of sending already overwhelmed cancer survivors out on their own to hunt for reputable cancer-exercise leaders who delivered research-driven programs.

Conversely, I had the exercise program he was looking for but no place to deliver it. The program I wanted to launch had been tested in clinical trials and boasted a 12-year record of success. But here's the rub: the program was free. Survivors could come whenever and as often as they liked. Indefinitely.

In order to implement this program, however, I needed an oncology center to invest \$60K for equipment and 800 square feet of space since I wouldn't be charging the cancer survivors any fees to cover the costs. The problem was getting a cancer center to invest in a program that wasn't their own. Failing that, I solicited commercial gyms for space, but they refused free entry for cancer survivors. And every charitable foundation I petitioned for funding invited me to return when I had "a sustainable business model." Free, they told me, isn't good business.

Not deterred, Dr. Northfelt and I decided to team up to promote exercise anyway. We didn't have the equipment or the space, but we did have a shared vision. Dr. Northfelt began routinely discussing with his patients the strong scientific evidence supporting exercise as a therapy. He'd then offer to refer them to me for consultation on exercise therapy.

So far, of the 148 survivors who have agreed to a consultation, Dr. Northfelt and I have launched 110 of them on their own individualized exercise paths. That's a whopping 74 percent success rate. HonorHealth's Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center in Scottsdale, AZ, has even generously invited me to use their exercise rehab center on Tuesdays when it would normally be closed, moving us one step closer to our goal. This cooperation and success fuels our hope that increasing survivor demand will spur cancer centers nationwide to include fully staffed, research-based, daily exercise therapy as a standard part of treatment for cancer survivors.

Throat cancer survivor and certified cancer exercise specialist Nancy Howe is founder of Strong Cancer Recovery, StrongCancerRecovery.org. Dr. Donald Northfelt is associate medical director of the Breast Clinic at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, AZ.



Four Steps to a Strong Recovery

Until exercise becomes a standard part of treatment for all cancer survivors, here is the four-step approach that Dr. Northfelt and I recommend to cancer survivors who want to pursue exercise therapy for improved recovery:

1 Talk to your oncologist about exercise. Ask what kind of exercise is appropriate for you and if you need to adhere to any restrictions.

2 Locate an accredited cancer exercise provider near you. A good place to start is by searching the websites of the American College of Sports Medicine (acsm.org), the American Council of Exercise (acefitness.org), the Cancer Exercise Training Institute (thecancerspecialist.com), and the Rocky Mountain

Cancer Rehabilitation Institute (unco.edu/rmcri).

3 Once you've found a cancer exercise specialist, open a dialogue between your oncologist and your exercise provider. Ask your oncologist for the best way to keep him or her informed of your exercise progress. And find out how your exercise provider should relay questions to your oncologist.

4 If a certified cancer exercise specialist isn't available in your area, you can start a walking program on your own. Do what feels comfortable to start, and gradually increase your speed or duration until you reach a plateau that you can comfortably sustain. Your goal should be to reach 150 minutes of brisk walking per week.