Clarion Review

Health & Fitness

Active Against Cancer: A Guide to Improving Your Cancer Recovery with Exercise
Nancy S. Brennan
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Five Stars (out of Five)

The prevailing advice for many people undergoing cancer treatment is to rest as much as possible so that the body can heal. With *Active Against Cancer: A Guide to Improving Your Cancer Recovery with Exercise*, first-time author and ovarian cancer survivor Nancy Smith Brennan clearly articulates why exercise is equally important to recovery and how physical activity can play a significant role in treatment.

Brennan's firsthand experience gives her writing a memoir-like intimacy that is consistently compelling. She helps readers create a balance between exercise and rest that has worked for her, as well as for many of the other survivors featured in the book. In each case, she emphasizes the need to personalize an exercise program based on one's past experience with athletics and individual goals.

For example, she profiles Kristen, a woman diagnosed with breast cancer at age forty, whose already active lifestyle helped her maintain her positive attitude toward exercise before, during, and after treatment. Kristen trained for a triathlon on the same days she received radiation, and she integrated yoga into the mix, experiencing greater stress reduction and better health as a result, she believes.

Another survivor, Raymond, wasn't quite so enthusiastic. He had to force himself to exercise, but the results were the same as Kristen's, proving that it doesn't matter if someone is eager to exercise or has to dig deep for the will to get moving.

One of the book's great strengths is the practical, easy-to-follow advice that Brennan provides. She is an invaluable guide to cancer recovery. She is neither a chirpy cheerleader encouraging readers to run a marathon, nor a stern coach making dire predictions about what can happen if exercise isn't part of a recovery plan. Instead, her tone and insights spring from her own long road to recovery.

Brennan is also adept at presenting research about the "why" of exercise for cancer patients, which should provide an additional level of motivation. She covers inflammation, greater levels of insulin, poor oxygenation in the blood, too much cortisol, excessive sex hormones, poor nutrition, and weakened immune systems. Exercise can have a significant effect on all of these "pro-cancer conditions" in the body. By explaining the difficulties of these conditions, Brennan gives people in cancer treatment and recovery more ownership of their own health choices.

Her straightforward advice makes Brennan's book truly valuable for cancer patients. Her profiles of active cancer survivors are inspiring. For those healing from cancer, *Active Against Cancer* is a call to exercise that is tough to resist.

Elizabeth Millard