

FAQs

Strength After Breast Cancer

Q: Should patients interested in participating in the Strength After Breast Cancer (Strength ABC) program first get clearance from their oncologist or physician before getting a screening by a PT/OT, CLT?

A: If patients are still in treatment, yes, they should first be cleared by the oncologist or GP. If the patient has completed treatment, clearance by their oncologist or GP is optional; however, the evaluation by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist (CLT) is still required. For direct-access states, it is recommended that PTs/OTs work at the top of their license and use their professional judgement on this issue.

Q: Should patients have stable limbs, i.e. any edema associated with existing lymphedema has been minimized?

A: Yes, the limb MUST be stable. In the PAL study, the researchers allowed the patients to self-report on their stability. If edema has not previously been addressed, it is recommended that the patientst undergo Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist. CDT includes Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) and compression therapy.

Q: If CDT is required, how soon after completion of treatment can the patient enter the Strength ABC program?

A: The patient can begin the Strength ABC program as soon as the arm is deemed stable by the treating therapist. There is some flexibility in this, however, because the beginning sessions can be done with no resistance.

Q: What symptoms indicate a “flare-up?”

A: Please see the downloadable bonus attachment, “Flare-Up Symptoms.”

Q: If a patient has a flare-up, how soon after the limb returns to its typical state can a patient return to the program?

A: The patient can return to the Strength ABC program as soon as the arm is deemed stable by the treating therapist. NOTE: If it has been longer than 3 weeks since the last weight training sessions, the patient should start over with 3-lb weights and rebuild slowly to avoid over-stressing the lymphatic system.

CAUTION: There are a few women whom might be termed ‘extreme responders’ who flare every time they lift more than X pounds (X varies by woman). Sometimes that X can be as little as five pounds. If a woman flares when she gets to X pounds, then flares again after treatment/rest at that same X pounds, keep her under X pounds.

Q: What are the signs and symptoms of a possible oncological emergency?

A: Please see the downloadable bonus attachment, “Signs of an Oncological Emergency.”