

# Cancer Survivors Scuba Dive with Sharks



When you get cancer, you have to embrace life and swim forward. (San Diego 6 in the Morning)



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## Scuba Diving **Inspiration for Cancer Survivors**

Brandon Bethea of San Diego based **Fin Forward**, featured on **San Diego 6 News in the Morning**, shares shark diving with cancer survivors and why fitness is important to Fin Forward.

*"Fin Forward focuses mostly on the emotional and therapeutic benefits gained from a shared group experience or life-changing adventure such as shark diving. Nonetheless, fitness is a key element of everything we do. As we see it, our trips are all about recreation (having fun!), resolution (sense of accomplishment), and rehabilitation (feeling better).*

**Resolution could mean as in a bucket list item or an inner (or physical) resolution of courage, determination, can-do attitude, etc.**

*We hope to create a personal milestone so that participants are confident that, if they can swim with sharks and conquer their fears, they can achieve things in other ways or areas of their life. In fact, many of our past participants are active within their own causes, ranging*

*from breast cancer awareness to ocean conservation to bone marrow donations. With cancer, every case is unique. Not everyone is willing or able to swim with sharks, so we offer a range of possibilities, classified as virtual, observatory, or active. Virtual options include shark adoptions, movie nights, and educational events. Others can observe marine life through whale-watching expeditions, dolphin sightseeing tours, or aquarium visits. Active adventures include everything from snorkeling with harmless leopard sharks at La Jolla to cage diving with great white sharks at an offshore site.*

*As we peer several years into the future, we are open to even more extreme adventures, such as space travel or deep sea explorations. These are physically demanding trips in their infancy stage of development, but as an organization helping survivors with their dreams, we can't help but ask "What if?" We think our shark dives are attractive to some survivors, because they are willing to try new things and experiences, which they may have not even considered prior to their diagnoses.*

## Why Fitness for Divers is Important to Fin Forward?

*Safety is of utmost importance to us, so we want to make sure people are comfortable and capable. Many of our shark dives are surface-based and require just basic swimming skills. Others require a bit more energy and exercise. Since sharks and other marine life are often frightened by divers' bubbles, we are frequently freediving, which can demand more leg strength, lung capacity, and longer dive times in order to truly enjoy the encounter. For our local, California-based experiences, fitness is crucial in combating the cold weather, challenging conditions, and changing currents. The last thing you want is to have a leg cramp interrupt a once-in-a-lifetime experience with a shark, dolphin, or other marine creature. Either way, we always have Rescue Divers and local species experts in the water in case of any injury or emergency and review safety procedures before entering the water."*

## Exercise to Prevent Cancer - Go Diving!

In addition to staying fit for scuba diving, exercise helps prevent cancer. The **American Institute of Cancer Research**, (AICR) "**Start Where You Are**" brochure of simple steps for physical activity summarizes the benefits.

*"Physical activity helps lower blood pressure, increase bone density, regulate cholesterol, control blood sugar, improve mood, increase brain function and improve circulation and fitness. Because of these effects, physical activity can help lower chances of cancer, heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, diabetes, depression, dementia and arthritis."*

Maintaining a healthy body composition is key to much of the correlations between physical activity and cancer prevention. Excess body fat, contributes to high levels of hormones and inflammatory proteins, which lead to high levels of insulin and cell damage; both increase cancer risk.

Scuba divers are encouraged to maintain a healthy body weight and composition to be safer in the underwater environment. Research indicates that obese divers are nine to 10 times more likely to suffer decompression sickness, use more air than aerobically fit divers, and require more effort to move through the water, compromising performance.

### **Exercise During Cancer Treatment - Consult With a Physician Before Scuba diving.**

According to AICR, *"research suggests that cancer patients who participate in a structured exercise program during chemotherapy (a practice commonly prescribed to heart patients) may reduce harmful effects of chemotherapy on the cardiovascular system, and therefore may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, years after treatment,"*

Maintaining the health of the heart and lungs is of particular interest to divers for continued participation in the sport, especially since cardiovascular illness and heart disease are the most prevalent medical conditions reported by divers.

Other research also indicates that exercise during treatment may reduce the reoccurrence of cancer. Exercise during treatment is recommended at a low intensity depending on energy. It is recommended that divers consult with their physician about both exercise and diving during treatment. Timing of diving after surgery and physical energy levels required for diving are of the greatest concern.

The **Rubicon Foundation** plans to release the results of their **Project Pink** study later this year. Scuba certified breast cancer survivors provided information on their health status, diagnosis and treatment specific to diving. The study hopes to learn more about and provide information to all divers about the effects of cancer and cancer therapy on the physical and mental health of divers and diving activity.

### **Exercise After Cancer - Continue Diving!**

Based on evidence found in **Divers Alert Network** (DAN) annual reports, cancer survivors who continued to scuba dive overcame, breast, prostate, head and neck cancers.

The **International Health Racquet and Sportsclub Associations** (IHRSA) cites studies in their online newsletter that demonstrate the benefits of exercise in managing depression in cancer survivors. IHRSA recommends *"cancer survivors could benefit from regular aerobic exercise, and may see further benefits by adding personal training or group classes to their schedule."* The research reveals a dose-response correlation; the more the cancer survivor exercises the more symptoms of depression are reduced.

For more information on fitness for scuba diving: [www.scubafit.com](http://www.scubafit.com), [www.fit-diver.com](http://www.fit-diver.com)