

# Taking control pumped her up

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It's amazing how a brush with serious illness can motivate someone to take charge of their health.

For Jacquie Meikle, it took the shock of breast cancer and the side effects of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatments to make her realize she didn't want to feel lousy any more.

"In some ways this cancer was the best thing," said Meikle, who admits before the diagnosis she was coasting through her 40s on a sporadic exercise program, at best.

"I haven't looked this good or felt this good in a very long time."

It was 2000 when Meikle discovered a lump in her breast. A needle biopsy showed it was cancer and Meikle was scheduled for surgery, six weeks of radiation and six months of chemotherapy.

She tried to exercise after her first chemo treatment, "but it just didn't go well," she said.

In 2001 she joined the Breaststrokes Dragonboat Team, which consists entirely of breast cancer survivors. They train at the University of Guelph.

The emotional support from women in



**Jacquie Meikle found that the strenuous training program, and support from other members of the Breaststrokes dragonboat team, helped her.**

the same boat, if you'll pardon the pun, has boosted Meikle's self-esteem and motivates her through the strenuous training program.

"It's the team that keeps me going. I know if I tried to work out on my own, I wouldn't keep it up as much as I have."

The team meets twice a week to train in the pool, running on the spot, using the water's resistance to work the arms, and employing other aquafit exercises to get their hearts pumping.

"I like it in the pool. It's a nice way to exercise — it doesn't hurt your joints," she said.

The team also lines up at the edge of the pool to practice paddling. They compete at least three times a year — Meikle joked that it's a heck of a lot of work for a three-minute race.

Weight lifting and stretching are also part of the regimen for the team. Meikle adds three 30-minute power walks a week when she can.

She finds she's stronger and her muscles are more lean. She has energy to get through her day and a greater sense of well-being.

And after such a serious illness, with death peering at her around the corner, making her body strong has given back the sense of control that was lost when she was a patient.

"I probably wouldn't have got into exercise if not for the cancer," Meikle said. "I walked a bit and played baseball some before the diagnosis, but I really was getting sluggish.

"Now I'm pushing 50 and there's more than just cancer that can get me. It's about time I got myself in gear."

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