

EXERCISE AND CANCER



The role exercise plays in cancer care is becoming increasingly important. Exercise is known to be safe and helpful for cancer survivors both during and after treatment, and oncologists and their teams continue to recommend exercise for their patients. Oncology rehabilitation and wellness programs are now considered to be part of standard cancer care.

THE ROLE OF EXERCISE IN CANCER PREVENTION AND CANCER OUTCOMES

Exercise plays an important role in the prevention of many cancers and is a **safe and effective strategy** to counteract many of the physical and psychological effects of cancer and its treatment.

Exercise is important for maintaining good health, reducing the risk of chronic disease, and aiding rehabilitation from disease.¹ The **benefits of exercise** are associated with positive cancer outcomes – function, fitness and quality of life. Growing evidence indicates exercise after diagnosis may improve long-term survival rates, particularly in **breast** and **colorectal cancer**.²

¹ Exercise and Cancer, Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA), 2019

² Exercise is Medicine® Australia

THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

The benefits of exercise for people with cancer may include:

- Improved muscle strength and fitness
- Improved physical function to help with everyday activities
- Improved immune function
- Improved chemotherapy completion rates
- Improved mood and self-esteem
- Reduced hospitalisation duration
- Reduced psychological and emotional stress, including depression and anxiety
- Reduced number and severity of symptoms and side-effects reported (e.g. pain, fatigue, nausea)
- Reduced chance of developing new cancers and other diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and osteoporosis

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WHEN IS EXERCISE BENEFICIAL?

Before treatment for cancer commences, exercise or 'prehabilitation' can help reduce subsequent treatment-related complications and enhance post-surgical recovery.

During treatment, exercise can minimise the number, duration and severity of side-effects.

Following treatment and into 'survivorship,' exercise can improve the speed of your recovery, aid in achieving a full recovery, and can prevent the development and/or improve the management of long-term effects, including "chemo brain" and fatigue.

At Cabrini, we offer many individualised and group programs specifically tailored for patients living with cancer. These programs can be accessed before, during and after treatment, both in and outside the hospital setting. They are aimed at promoting wellness and empowering people living with cancer.

Five considerations for exercising with cancer

Our Accredited Exercise Physiologists (AEP) and physiotherapists offer the following advice to help develop and maintain an exercise routine that's right for you!

1) How much exercise?

For adults, the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) guidelines recommend (per week):

- 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic exercise
- Two to three resistance sessions per week, focusing on your larger muscle groups in your arms and legs.

2) What type of exercise?

There are different types of exercise and finding the kind of exercise you enjoy is so important. An effective exercise plan will include a variety of exercise to help you achieve the best benefits for your body.

- **Aerobic training.** Activities like walking and running are great aerobic exercise. But activities of daily living (ADLs), such as laundry, bathing, dressing, or cooking, may be where you start.
- **Resistance training.** Although resistance training is one of the most important types of exercise during and after cancer treatment, not many cancer patients do it! Movements such as standing up from a chair or toilet, climbing stairs, and carrying grocery bags all require muscle strength. Resistance exercise, which can help reduce fatigue and improve body power, will make these tasks easier.

3) Make it fun and functional

If you're just starting out...think about the movements that you need to accomplish activities in your daily life, and if they are difficult, train for them! For example, if a full laundry basket is too heavy, separate it into smaller loads and increase the amount steadily over a couple of weeks.

4) Exercise requires energy

Hydration and eating well, especially protein rich foods, are key to recovery after exercising. Exercise also has a powerful role in improving the quality of sleep, which also aids your recovery. If your body cannot recover properly from a new exercise regime, it can be harder to stick with your exercise program.

5) Exercise with friends or family

Another way to make your exercise program consistent is to tell someone close to you about your exercise plan. Then, empower that person to encourage you by asking you about it regularly, or even join you! Group exercise is a great way to share your goals with other like-minded people, have some fun and be supported socially at the same time.



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Our AEPs and physiotherapists can help you create, expand, modify or build an exercise program that is **effective, fun and individualised** to you. They will design an exercise program that will consider your:

- **Response to exercise** – the AEP will follow measures like heart rate, blood pressure and rating of perceived exhaustion (RPE) to understand your body's response to exercise.
- **Symptoms** – the AEP will consider and accommodate any treatment-associated symptoms you are experiencing such as cancer related fatigue, urinary incontinence or bone pain in the prescription of exercise.
- **Treatment cycles** – the AEP will also work with you to understand when to reduce or increase exercise, to fit in and around your medical interventions.
- **Program design** with exercises and activities that you enjoy, to better assist you in adhering to your exercise plan and goals.



COSTS

There may be costs associated with some services/programs. Rebates may be available through your private health insurance, or ask your GP about a chronic disease management plan.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For referrals and enquiries regarding exercise with an AEP or physiotherapist, in either 1:1 or group sessions, please contact ACCESS on (03) 9508 1700 or email access@cabrini.com.au.

This information sheet was adapted from information from The Exercise and Cancer eBook, by Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA)

Disclaimer: This information sheet is provided for general information purposes only. This information sheet does not provide you with specific personal, professional or medical advice. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional or medical advice and should not be relied upon as such. You should obtain advice from your treating doctor or healthcare professional about your individual circumstances.

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