

# EXERCISE & CHEMOTHERAPY



Are you currently undergoing or about to undergo chemotherapy? Have you finished chemotherapy? Wherever you are on your cancer trajectory, our skilled Oncology Allied Health team are here to help you and support you through your treatment.

## WHAT IS CHEMOTHERAPY?

There are various medical approaches to treating cancer – chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, hormone therapy and immunotherapy. Many cancer treatments involve combinations of these therapies to provide the best possible outcomes. Each treatment type brings its own array of challenges, both throughout treatment cycles and beyond.

**Chemotherapy** is one of the most common cancer treatment methods for various types of cancer. It can be administered through infusion (via a needle or port) or orally. The chemotherapy drugs target the rapidly dividing cancer cells in order to kill the cancer or slow down its growth. Unfortunately, these life-saving chemotherapy drugs cannot distinguish between the bad cancer cells and our good cells, and therefore patients are faced with a number of nasty side-effects. However, there is a growing body of evidence that shows **tailored exercise** during chemotherapy can reduce unwanted side-effects, improve function, maintain physical health, and aid treatment outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

## THE POSITIVE ROLE THAT EXERCISE CAN PLAY DURING CHEMOTHERAPY

During chemotherapy, research has demonstrated that exercise can:

### Decrease cancer-related fatigue

Chemotherapy can be associated with continual and overwhelming physical and psychological fatigue. Your exercise program should be **fun** and **functional** and include a mixture of both aerobic and resistance based exercise for maximal benefits.

### Improve immune function and decrease rates of hospitalisation

Our immune systems are **very responsive to exercise!** Both exercise dosage and intensity play a key role in immunity and therefore programs designed by an Accredited Exercise Physiologist (AEP) or physiotherapist take this into consideration.

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

## CABRINI CANCER EXERCISE AND WELLNESS CENTRE

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### Reduce chemotherapy-related neuropathy symptoms

Regular exercise that includes aerobic, resistance and balance exercise, can lessen both the severity and prevalence of neuropathic symptoms. A relatively frequent side-effect of chemotherapy is neuropathy. Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy is a progressive, enduring, and often irreversible condition resulting in pain, numbness, tingling and sensitivity to cold in the hands and feet. Such symptoms can present difficulties with walking and balance or holding and manipulating small objects.

### Help to maintain and improve physical functioning

Chemotherapy can have a profound impact on your day to day interests and hobbies. Everyday activities like doing the shopping, picking up children, going to work or driving a car can become increasingly difficult, due to both fatigue and loss of strength. **Resistance training can help minimise your loss of strength and ensure your daily tasks don't seem so challenging.**

### Reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease

Some chemotherapy drugs can increase your risk of heart problems such as heart failure, stroke and coronary heart disease. Whether you're at risk of heart problems during and after cancer treatment depends on how healthy your heart is and the specific drugs you'll be receiving. Irrespective of your treatment, **exercise commenced or continued after a cancer diagnosis is associated with reductions in newly diagnosed heart disease.**

### Improve treatment tolerance and completion rates

Completion of cancer treatment depends on how well you tolerate the treatment and its associated side-effects. As exercise therapy can have a positive influence on pain levels, cancer-related fatigue, and psychological wellbeing, it is logical that **exercise helps more people to fully complete treatment, in turn giving them the best chance of survival.**

### Improved survival rates

**Exercise is associated with improved survival rates following cancer.** Participating in exercise both during treatment and beyond is better than none, and more exercise is better than less!

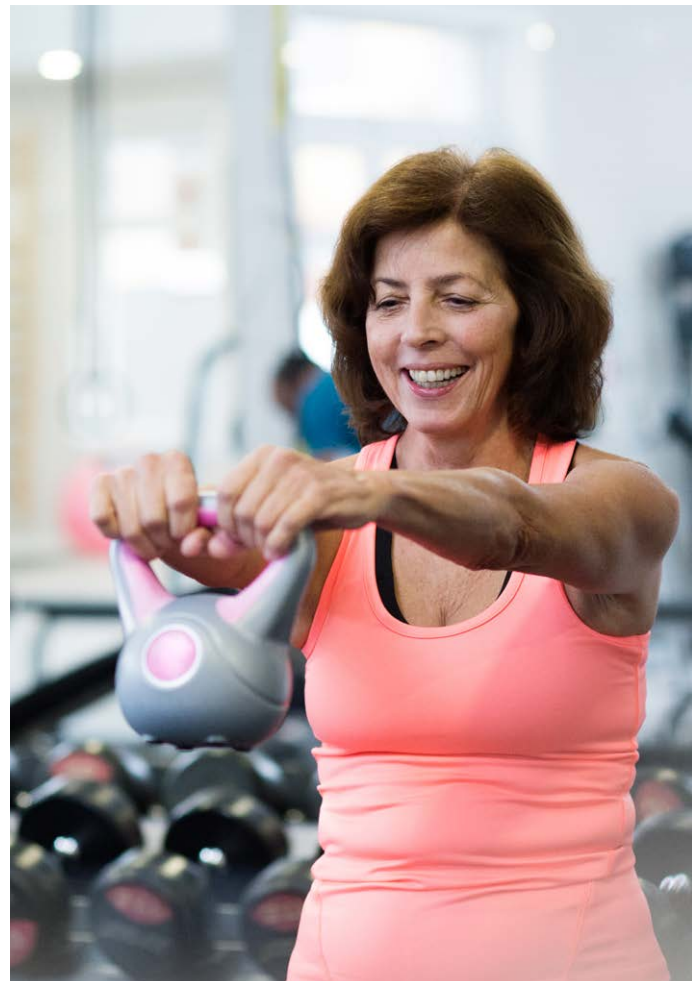
### HOW MUCH AND WHAT TYPE OF EXERCISE IS RECOMMENDED?

Exercise is considered safe and more beneficial when commenced at an appropriate level and progressed gradually, guided by an exercise professional.

Our AEPs and physiotherapists follow the current Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) guidelines that encourage:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity **aerobic** exercise (the exercises that make you huff and puff) per week. This may include jogging, cycling, brisk walking or swimming.
- Two to three **resistance** exercise sessions (exercises that make your muscles and bones strong) per week, focussing on your larger muscle groups in your arms and legs.

Both **aerobic** and **resistance** exercise is recommended as each type of exercise training has specific benefits and both are considered safe during chemotherapy treatment.



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### WHAT IF YOU DON'T CURRENTLY EXERCISE?

Pre-exercise screening and assessment is often a valuable first step in determining the level of supervision required to maximise the safety of exercise (e.g. unsupervised, group-based sessions or individual supervised sessions).

The exercise prescription that works best for you is determined by a variety of factors including an assessment, which identifies and considers general and cancer-specific health issues and their contribution to your quality of life, in addition to any other personal goals.

Consulting an **AEP** or **physiotherapist** can assist in encouraging you to explore diverse exercise options to maximise enjoyment, goal achievement and greatest benefit.



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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### WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN SEEING AN EXERCISE PROFESSIONAL

Due to the complexity of chemotherapy treatment, our AEPs and physiotherapists consider many different factors when **tailoring your exercise program**. These include:

- **Tailoring** your exercise to your current level of fitness and ability
- Monitoring your response to exercise by looking at your heart rate, blood pressure and rating of perceived exertion (RPE) to understand your body's response to exercise
- **Adjusting** exercise duration and intensity on 'bad days'
- Modifying exercise intensity in the first week following chemotherapy, as this is when symptoms are likely to be at their worst
- **Accommodating any treatment-associated symptoms** you are experiencing such as cancer-related fatigue, urinary incontinence or bone pain in the prescription of exercise
- Adapting your program to consider your anticipated disease trajectory
- Incorporating a **flexible** exercise schedule
- Designing the program to incorporate exercises and activities that you enjoy

During the initial consultation, the AEP or physiotherapist will explore/discuss with you:

- Your experience with cancer, including diagnosis and treatment (completed, current and planned)
- Side-effects you are experiencing due to the respective treatment that has been undertaken
- Your current exercise levels and overall fitness capacity
- Your previous injury history
- Your exercise goals

*Exercise may sometimes feel like the last thing you want to do when going through chemotherapy, but it is likely that during these times, you will benefit the most from doing it.*

### 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](mailto:access@cabrini.com.au).

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