

Exercise and Lymphoma

Exercise can greatly improve your physical and mental wellbeing. This fact sheet gives an overview of the benefits of exercise and outlines things to think about during and after your treatment for lymphoma.

Many doctors now encourage people with lymphoma and other cancers to be as active as possible during treatment and recovery. You will need to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program. This is true even if you exercised regularly before being diagnosed. Although exercise is safe for many people, there are some exceptions. For example, if you are at risk for infection or anemia you may not be able to exercise. This is why consulting your doctor is an important first step. There may be times when you do not feel able to exercise. The goal is to be as active as you comfortably can be. Try exercising when you have the most energy.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE?

Exercise has a range of benefits and may help to reduce side effects of some treatments for lymphoma. It can:

- Reduce stress and improve your mood
- Stimulate your appetite
- Reduce side effects like nausea and constipation
- Lower fatigue and improve your energy levels
- Help you sleep
- Increase muscle and bone strength which improves your mobility and balance
- Help you maintain or achieve a healthy weight
- Reduce your risk of infections while you are on treatment
- Increase overall physical wellbeing, which can enable your medical team to provide optimum treatment
- Shorten the time it takes to recover from treatment

SHOULD PEOPLE WITH CANCER EXERCISE?

Recent research suggests that exercise benefits most people both during and after cancer treatment. It can help manage some of the common side effects of treatment, speed up your return to your usual activities and improve your quality of life. The evidence also shows there is little risk of exercise causing harm if care is taken and professional exercise advice is followed closely. People with lymphoma should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow. Some days may be harder than others, but even a few minutes of light exercise is better than no exercise at

all. You may want to work out to two different exercise plans – one for your good days and another for those days when you are experiencing more side effects.

Talk to your health care team before starting an exercise program, particularly if you have any persistent treatment-related side effects, such as shortness of breath, nerve damage, skin irritation, fatigue or pain. Your doctor can advise whether you need a modified exercise program. If you have severe anaemia, high fever or severe weight loss, your doctor may recommend you delay starting an exercise program until your condition improves. If you are already very active at the time of the cancer diagnosis, talk to your doctor and an exercise professional about how you can retain your fitness during and after treatment.

HOW MUCH EXERCISE SHOULD I DO?

The amount of exercise you should do depends on factors like your general health and whether you are currently having treatment for lymphoma. Your emotional response to having lymphoma and personal preferences regarding exercise are also important. For some people, a little exercise is enough. Others are motivated to set goals and challenge themselves. Speak to your medical team for advice on the type and intensity of exercise that is best for you.

In Australia the current recommendations on exercise for people with cancer who are otherwise well are the same as they are for people without cancer. For adults they should usually aim to be active for at least 30 minutes on most, preferably all, days of the week. Australia Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Adults urge everyone to move more and sit less. Physical activity is any activity that gets your body moving and speeds up your breathing and heartbeat. It includes not only structured exercise sessions, but also everyday activities such as housework.

WHAT TYPE OF EXERCISE I DO?

For some people, exercise is a social activity. For others, it's a time to be alone that provides a pleasant break. There are many different types of exercise; it's important to find what you can safely enjoy. Exercise doesn't have to mean working out at a gym or running long distances. You probably already build activity in your daily life in many ways, for example when you:

FACT SHEET

- Go for a walk
- Climb stairs
- Vacuum clean
- Carry shopping bags

Increase your activity levels gradually, especially if you are not used to exercising. Alternate activity and rest to allow your body to recuperate. Remember that lymphoma and its treatment put a strain on your body. The time your body takes to recover after exercise can therefore be longer than it was before you had lymphoma. We strongly recommend that you speak to your healthcare professional or your doctor about what exercise is safe for you.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD I TAKE WHEN EXERCISING?

It is important to seek advice from your medical team about the type and intensity of exercise that is suitable for you. It is important to realise, however, that you might be able to do as much exercise as you did before you had lymphoma. Build in regular breaks and give yourself enough time to recuperate after exercise.

During or soon after your treatment for lymphoma, your medical team may advise you to avoid particular activities if you have certain side effects. Side effects can affect the type of exercise you can do. It is important to avoid high-impact sports due to the risk of bleeding and high intensity exercise is likely to be more difficult. Some of the effects from the chemotherapy may affect your grip and balance, which could make some types of exercises unsafe. If you have this, it might be better to use a stationary bike than to do other types of weight bearing exercise.

Infection is a risk post chemotherapy, so avoid places where risk of infection is higher, such as public swimming pools and gyms. Swimming has many health benefits. It fits into all 3 categories of exercise: aerobic, muscle-strengthening and weight-bearing. There may, however, be times when swimming carries risks for you. You may need to avoid public swimming pools if you are neutropenic (low blood counts) in order to avoid infection from public pools and changing rooms. Chlorine can irritate the area of skin that has received treatment from radiotherapy also and if you have a central line in place you need to be careful as swimming could dislodge it and increase your risk of infection through the line.

CAN EXERCISE HELP MY RECOVERY FROM LYMPHOMA TREATMENT?

There is a lot of evidence that exercise can have a positive impact on recovery from treatment. Although much of the research has been done on people who have had treatment for breast cancer, similar findings come from studies looking at other cancer types.

Exactly how exercise helps recovery is not yet known, however, its potential to shorten recovery time, ease fatigue and boost mental wellbeing are well recognised. Some people see the end of treatment as a good time to begin a healthier lifestyle.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Organisation	How can they help?
Lymphoma Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lymphoma Australia offers a wide variety of resources and support for people with lymphoma or CLL and their carers. Please visit our website www.lymphoma.org.au for further information• Lymphoma Nurse Support Line: 1800 953 081 or email: nurse@lymphoma.org.au• Online private Facebook group: Lymphoma Down Under http://bit.ly/316t3Wk
EX-MED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is a safe and effective program specifically designed for people with cancer and supported by the Victorian Government. www.exmedcancer.org.au

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

- Can I exercise while I'm having this treatment?
- Are there any types of exercise I should avoid?
- I have a port or PICC line. What precautions should I take?
- I haven't exercised much before. Do I need to have any general health checks first?
- Can you recommend an exercise professional who has experience helping people with cancer?

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOUR EXERCISE PROFESSIONALS

- Have you completed any training focused on exercise for people with cancer?
- What will you consider when preparing an exercise program for someone with my medical history?
- How will I know that I am doing the exercises correctly?
- What should I do if I feel pain when exercising?
- Can I start slowly?
- What if I feel too unwell to exercise?
- How long might it be before I start to see some benefits from this exercise program?
- How many appointments are we likely to need?

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