



**valion**health

# Exercise and Cancer

A Guide for Patients and  
Carers

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# Why is exercise important for people with cancer?

Ongoing research has shown that exercise is a safe and effective way to counteract many of the negative effects of cancer and its treatment.

The benefits of exercise for people with cancer can include:

- Improved muscle strength and fitness;
- Improved ability to do everyday activities;
- Reduced number and severity of symptoms and side effects reported (e.g., pain, fatigue, nausea);
- Improved immune function;
- Improved mental health;
- Reduced chance of developing new cancers and other health issues such as heart disease, diabetes and weakened bones.

**Benefits are shown for exercise during treatment and also after treatment has finished.**





# Where do I start? What type of exercise and how much?

Everyone is different when it comes to exercise prescription and depending on the type of cancer and the current cancer treatment cycle, exercise should be tailored to each person.

For most people, an assortment of exercises consisting of aerobic, resistance and stretching exercises will be beneficial.

**There is no set type and amount that would be considered consistent across all people with cancer - it has to be individualised. Start slowly and progress from there. Remember that some exercise is better than none.**

Make sure you talk to your health professional before starting an exercise program, particularly if you have had recent surgery, have bone cancer or if you have any persistent treatment-related side effects, such as lymphoedema, shortness of breath, nerve damage, skin irritation, severe fatigue or pain.



**IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT IT'S NOT A "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" APPROACH.**



## Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise is any activity that gets the heart beating faster and includes everything from walking and cycling to working out on the elliptical machine and dancing. Sometimes it is also referred to as 'cardiovascular exercise' or 'endurance exercise'.

Everyone is different, so it's hard to give a general recommendation on how much and how often.

**The goal should be to move through the day and be as physically active as your current condition allows.**

If you can, it's recommended that you try to exercise at a moderate intensity e.g. brisk walking (See page 10,11 of this guide).





## Resistance (Strength) Exercise

Resistance exercise aims to increase the size and strength of muscles, and includes everything from:

- body weight exercises like squats, wall push ups and step ups
- dumbbells
- exercise bands and
- machine weight exercises

**Resistance exercises are normally done a few times per week.**

This type of training can improve your fatigue, improve your quality of life and make everyday tasks such as getting off the floor and climbing stairs easier.

Some people like to do this type of training in a gym, or group class, but you can also do some basic exercises at home if that's easier for you.





## Stretching and Mobility

Flexibility exercises such as stretches can be a gentle way to include some movement in your day. They can help overcome stiffness in your joints and muscles.

These could include exercises given to you following surgery, or by an Exercise Physiologist or Physiotherapist.

Yoga is another way of including some flexibility exercises into your routine, and it may also have benefits on you mood, fatigue levels and sleep. It's best to work with a yoga teacher or yoga therapist with expertise in cancer support.





# Common Questions About Exercise and Cancer

## ***I'm already fatigued! Won't exercise make it worse?***

Research has shown exercise to be safe and helpful for people who are fatigued and have low energy levels (see the next page)

## ***I've never really exercised. Is it safe for me to start exercise during treatment?***

As long as you start slowly and build up over time. Working with an Exercise Professional with experience in cancer care can really help. It's also good to speak with your medical team.

## ***I don't like gyms! Do I need to go to one?***

Your exercise program needs to work for you. This might include joining a group at your treatment centre, working on a home strength program or focusing on walking. If you enjoy it and see benefit then you are more likely to keep it up.



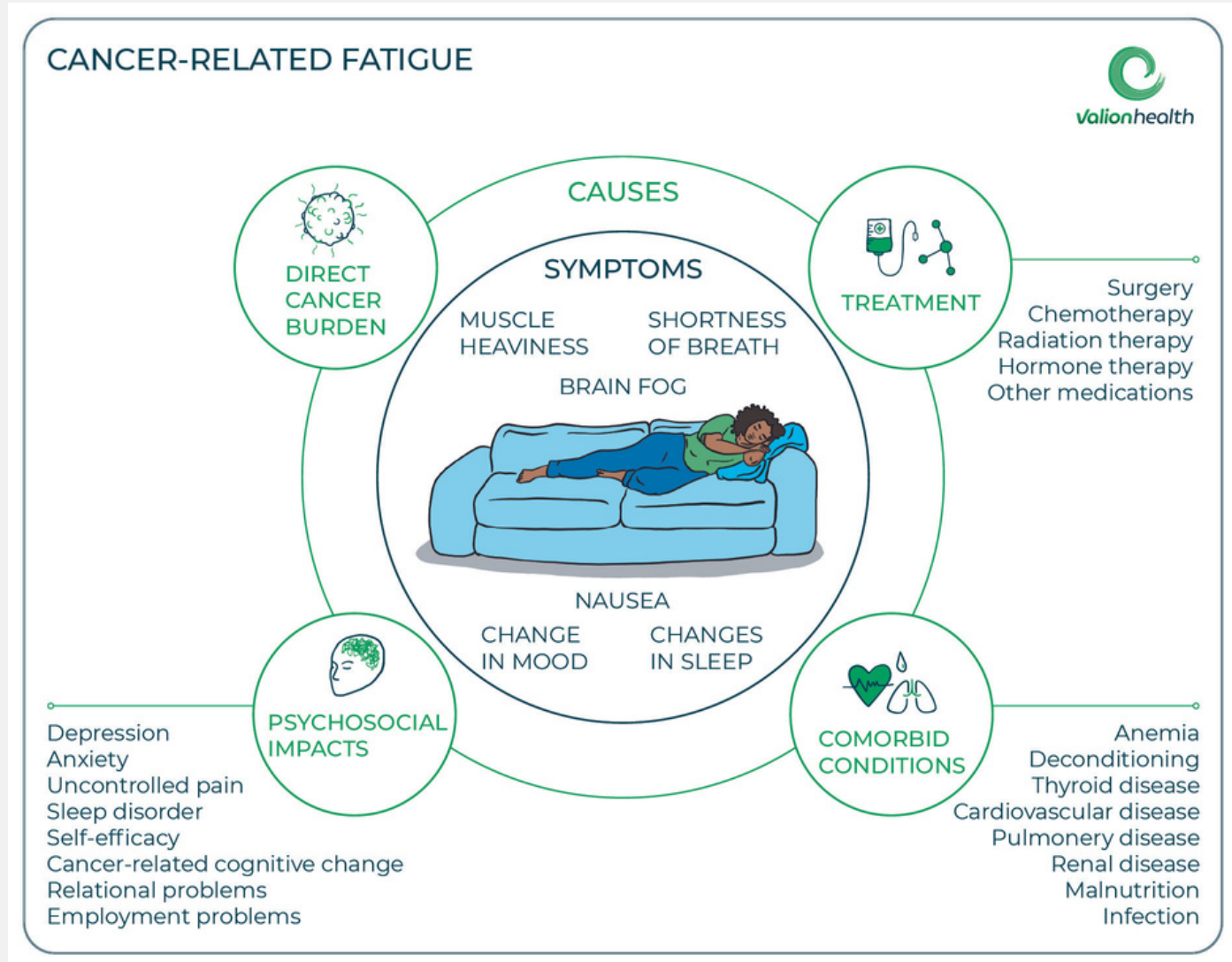
# Exercise and Cancer Fatigue

**Cancer-Related Fatigue (CRF) is one of the most common side effect of people with a diagnosis of cancer. It's very normal!**

CRF can be caused numerous and overlapping factors including the cancer itself, treatment, impact on your mental health and other health conditions.

**Appropriate exercise has been shown to be safe for people with CRF, and one of the best 'treatments' to improve energy levels and reduce fatigue.**

If you have consistent fatigue that impacts your life day to day, particularly after you have finished treatment, you should speak to your medical team.





## Exercise works best with social support

We know exercise can make you feel happy, help minimise treatment-related side effects, and improve treatment outcomes, but it can be hard to get started.

**It's important to stay motivated, and surrounding yourself with supportive people can make all the difference.**

This could include exercising:

- in a small, supervised group
- with family or friends
- as part of a program, such as Valion Health's Cancer Support





## How do I measure intensity?

A quick way to test your exercise intensity is using the talk test.

When exercising can you:

- Talk comfortably and sing comfortably? You're probably exercising at a light intensity.
- Talk comfortably but not sing? This is likely to be moderate intensity exercise.
- Neither talk nor sign comfortably? You're working hard at a vigorous/high intensity





## How do I measure intensity?

Along with the talk test, some people like to use a 0-10 "RPE" rating scale to record the intensity of their exercise.

**Again, intensity of exercise is very individualised, but many people will be focusing on achieving an RPE between 4-7/ 10.**

This would be seen as a moderate intensity.

Try recording RPE next time you exercise and use the below diary as an example of how you could track your habits.

## RPE - Rating of Perceived Exertion

RPE SCALE	RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION
<b>10</b> /	<b>MAX EFFORT ACTIVITY</b> Feels almost impossible to keep going. Completely out of breath, unable to talk. Cannot maintain for more than a very short time
<b>9</b> /	<b>VERY HARD ACTIVITY</b> Very difficult to maintain exercise intensity. Can barely breathe and speak only a few words
<b>7-8</b> /	<b>VIGOROUS ACTIVITY</b> Borderline uncomfortable. Short of breath, can speak a sentence
<b>4-6</b> /	<b>MODERATE ACTIVITY</b> Breathing heavily, can hold a short conversation. Still somewhat comfortable, but becoming noticeably more challenging
<b>2-3</b> /	<b>LIGHT ACTIVITY</b> Feels like you can maintain for hours. Easy to breathe and carry a conversation
<b>1</b> /	<b>VERY LIGHT ACTIVITY</b> Hardly any exertion, but more than sleeping, watching TV, etc





# Speaking with an Exercise Professional

Working with an Accredited Exercise Physiologist or Physiotherapist with experience in cancer care can be of real support.

**Your exercise professional will be able to provide you with a safe and effective program, that is personalised to your needs.**

This program will be adaptable, and take into consideration your background, your goals, the type of treatment you are having and the side effects you may be experiencing.

If you haven't been referred to an Exercise Professional, get in touch with us [info@valionhealth.com.au](mailto:info@valionhealth.com.au) or phone 1300 561 020.





# Further Reading on Exercise and Cancer

[RACGP. - Exercise is Medicine in Cancer Care](#)

[The Exercise and Sports Science Australia position statement: Exercise medicine in cancer management](#)

[Exercise Guidelines for Cancer Survivors: Consensus statement from International Multidisciplinary Roundtable](#)

[ABC Catalyst Story](#)

[TEDX Talk - Exercise and Cancer](#)

[Reach Podcast](#)





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