Myeloma Australia

information sheet

Exercise with Myeloma

Introduction

All people are encouraged to exercise to help with fatigue, general well-being, weight management and help prevent health issues associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

People with myeloma experience many physical and psychological effects associated with the disease and its treatments which are often long and complex.

Over the last decade, people with myeloma participating in research into prescribed exercise programs have found that these symptoms of disease and therapy can be moderated or improved with individually appropriate levels of exercise, resulting in improved overall quality of life

What to expect from exercising

Commonly experienced disease and treatment effects that may benefit from exercise include:
Physical
Pain and discomfort
Fatigue and general weakness
Loss of appetite and weight loss
Weight gain/fluid retention from high dose steroids
Peripheral neuropathy
Swelling/fluid retention in legs
Loss of muscle tone, strength, endurance
Reduced flexibility
Psychological
Disturbed sleep and sleep patterns
Anxiety, stress and/or depression
Decreased motivation or interest to engage in normal activities
Inertia (i.e. perceived need to struggle to overcome inactivity)
Diminished attention or concentration

How to start

The first rule of thumb is it's necessary to feel better 10 – 15 min after exercise than was felt beforehand. If not, the exercise was too much at this time.

Start small and increase a little bit each time.

Acknowledge a feeling of accomplishment. This will encourage repeated activity.

It may help to make a commitment with someone (or a group) to exercise with regularly.

Aim of exercising	How to get there
Participate frequently enough to feel benefit	**Any exercise** is better than none. Start small and slowly increase frequency. It may be as small as getting up and walking across the room 3x/day; or walking around the block daily. As long as it provides a sense of feeling better and accomplishment.
Intense enough to increase breathing and heart rate, but not enough to cause pain, gasping or a struggle to recover	Aim for a slight but noticeable increase in breathing and heart rate. The ability to talk comfortably should be retained whilst exercising
Long enough to feel benefit	This depends on fitness levels in the beginning. For some people that may be as little as 3 minutes. Aim to reach a regular minimum of 30 minutes on most days

Type of exercises that are safe

Getting started	After a long period of immobility, an accredited exercise physiologist is the best person to get the body moving safely. Exercises are tailored for myeloma skeletal damage, muscle weakness, level of pain, balance, motivation and fatigue.
Slow breathing and gentle, big limb movements	When the body is out of condition, simple movements can help the body regain some fitness and feel better. Sit or stand in a position that is comfortable. Try gentle swimming actions with the arms and sliding the feet forward and back over the floor.
Chair exercises (stable, solid and without wheels or arms)	Sit with feet flat on the floor and knees bent at right angles. Some movements to try include: chest stretch, hip marching, ankle rotation, neck stretching – refer https://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/NHS_ExercisesForOlderPeople.pdf
Tai Chi	Improves balance, posture, strength and flexibility and reduces stress and fatigue.
Walking	Wear footwear that makes movement steady, use a walking aid if needed, avoid uneven ground. Wading through shallow to thigh deep water (pool) adds resistance and lessens falls. Walking uses large muscle groups and helps circulation.
Swimming	Builds strength without putting stress on joints. Swim sidestroke, backstroke or walk in the water. Prolonged swimming face down, e.g. freestyle or breaststroke, puts stress on the lower back and may make back pain worse or cause damage. Don't swim if the white cells are low or there is a central venous access device such as a Hickman line or PICC line in place. This may increase the risk of infection. Public pools should have a regular cleaning schedule. Try to visit soon after the pool has been cleaned.
Stationary bike riding, (use a normal bike with a stationary bike trainer stand)	Helps build leg strength and can be performed in any weather whilst watching TV or even reading. Reduces risk of falls off the bike because it's stationary and inside.

Exercises to avoid or use caution

Resistance training	Avoid overhead exercises, heavy loads and extreme ranges of motion (such as deep squats, leg press or bench press that takes the elbows past the weights bench). However, light resistance training under the guidance of an Accredited Exercise Physiologist can be very helpful.
Pilates / Yoga	Avoid extreme ranges of motion and spinal flexion, extension and rotation. Focus on the smaller, subtle movements and exercises.
High impact exercises/sports	Such as jogging, tennis, squash or golf (severe rotation forces) or contact sports like football, basketball or boxing should be avoided if there is any bone damage, (especially spine, pelvis, long bones), due to force applied through the bones increasing the risk of compression and pathological fractures.

How often to exercise

Exercise on as many days of the week as possible without increasing symptoms. Exercising too hard on any day, or too often can exacerbate symptoms such as fatigue and pain. It involves trying different ways to exercise and finding what is right. An Exercise Physiologist can really help out in the beginning.

For low intensity, aim for daily. If exercise time is lengthy or exercise is high intensity, three days per week may be all that is needed.

Start with a small, achievable amount of exercise every day. This can be as simple as walking to different rooms in the house, then increasing to the letterbox and back once per day. Once this causes no fatigue or pain, increase the distance to walk past the neighbour's house and back. As appropriate, increase the distance each week.

Myeloma and its treatments cause symptoms, such as fatigue. It is normal to fluctuate in how much exercise possible. Listen to the body and don't be disheartened if today's effort is less than what was achieved yesterday, especially whilst on active or new myeloma treatment. Generally, there will be improvement, especially when on stable maintenance treatment or when having a treatment break.

If any symptoms persist, talk with the doctor. These changes should be a normal part of the process and it's helpful to be gentle on the body and have realistic expectations.

The most important piece of advice is:

Try to feel a little better at the end of exercise compared to when first started.

How to exercise safely

Some things to be aware of are;

Pain	If there are bone complications present or peripheral neuropathy, pain may constantly limit activity. DO NOT keep exercising if pain starts or increases. The doctor should assess any new pain. Slow down, breathe gently and talk to the treating professionals.

Low white cells (Neutropenia)	During certain phases of the disease and some treatments the neutrophils may be low. When neutropenic, it is important not to do activities that may increase the risk of infection such as swimming in a public pool, participating in large classes and gardening.
Low platelets (Thrombocytopenia)	Reduced capacity for the blood to clot, caused by the myeloma itself or treatments, increases the risk of bruising and bleeding from injury. Ask the treating team about the risks.
Low haemoglobin (Anaemia)	Lowered oxygen carrying capacity in the blood can cause shortness of breath, fatigue, mental confusion and muscle weakness. It is important not to over exert if anaemic.
Peripheral neuropathy (PN)	Changes in sensation and/or motor function in the extremities e.g. fingers, hands, feet and calves. Balance may be affected increasing the risk of falls. Try gentle range of motion exercises such as drawing circles with the toes and straightening and bending the hips and knees. Choose a type of exercise which does not worsen neuropathic pain.
Dizzy spells or low blood pressure	To give the blood pressure time to adjust to prevent feelings of dizziness, start an exercise slowly; avoid holding the breath and stand from a seated or lying position slowly.

Stop exercising and consult the doctor if any of the following occur whilst exercising, shortness of breath, dizziness or nausea, sharp pain in a specific area, increased fatigue or weakness.

In summary:

Exercise is encouraged. It has many health benefits both for myeloma patients and healthy individuals. It is important to listen to the body and to build up the exercise routine gradually, do a little often. Set realistic goals, aim to feel better and enjoy a sense of accomplishment.

For further information please contact one of our Myeloma Support Nurses on our Support Line:
1800 MYELOMA (1800 693 566)
or visit our website: **www.myeloma.org.au**

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