Myeloma Australia

LIVING WELL INFOSHEET

Exercise and myeloma

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Things to remember

- Enjoying regular exercise is a very important part of living well with myeloma.
- Research shows that people with myeloma who participate in prescribed exercise programs experience an improved overall quality of life, helping them to manage both the symptoms of myeloma itself and the side effects of treatments.
- Exercise can reduce pain, fatigue, and breathlessness, and improve sleep, mood, energy levels, memory, concentration, and your ability to perform daily activities.
- An accredited exercise physiologist (EP) or physiotherapist (physio) is the best person to prescribe a safe individualised exercise program for you.
- Many people with myeloma benefit from a combination of walking, tai chi, stationary cycling, and muscle strengthening activities.
- People with myeloma will achieve greater benefits from supervised, individualised exercise that involves higher intensity aerobic (increased heart rate) and muscle-strengthening exercises.
- It's best to avoid contact sports and unsupervised lifting of heavy weights or impact activities. You may also need to avoid public swimming pools and gyms when your risk of infection is higher.
- It's ideal to start with a small amount of exercise and increase a little bit each time, gradually building up to at least 30 minutes of activity on most days.
- Notice the feeling of accomplishment and wellbeing you have after exercise (make a note in your diary or on your phone), and use this for motivation next time.
- Keep track of any adverse effects you may experience, such as muscle cramps or spasms, and ask your EP or physio how they can adjust your program to avoid these problems.

If you're reading a printed version of this infosheet, we've used a magnifying glass symbol throughout to let you know where you can search for more information in the **'Learn more'** section at the end of this infosheet.

About exercise when you have myeloma

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for everyone. It can help improve general wellbeing, increase energy, reduce fatigue, and help with managing your weight. It can also help to prevent and manage chronic health problems like diabetes and heart disease.

Living with myeloma — both the condition itself and the side effects of treatment — can impact many parts of your physical and mental wellbeing, which are often long-lasting and complex. Some of these effects can make exercise feel more challenging, but they also make exercise especially important in helping to manage your symptoms and side effects.

Research shows that people with cancer who participate in prescribed exercise programs experience an improved overall quality of life. Improvements can include reduced cancer-related fatigue (CRF), pain and breathlessness, and improved mood, independence, stamina, sleep, memory, concentration, and possibly, a shorter hospital stay.

It's often said that if we could manufacture a medicine with all these benefits, it would fly off the shelves!

Exercising safely with myeloma does have some additional challenges. The suggestions in this infosheet will help you to exercise as safely as possible. Remember to always talk with your treating team before starting a new exercise program. Your accredited exercise physiologist (EP) or physiotherapist (physio) can provide you with more information and a targeted exercise program that's specific to your needs.

The many benefits of exercise

Targeted exercises performed regularly can help to improve:

- pain and discomfort
- cancer-related fatigue
- anxiety and depression
- weakness
- breathlessness
- loss of appetite
- weight management
- peripheral neuropathy
- bone strength
- muscle tone, strength, endurance, and flexibility
- balance
- sleep
- mood changes
- motivation
- 'chemo brain' and cognitive function
- general wellbeing and quality of life.

Remember to begin each exercise session with warm-up exercises, and finish with a cool-down and stretching.

What types of exercise are best?

After a long period of illness or immobility, an EP or physio is the best person to help get your body moving safely again. These health professionals can tailor an exercise program to help cater for and improve myeloma bone damage, pain, fatigue, breathlessness, muscle weakness, balance, motivation, and more.

Some types of exercise that may be especially helpful for people with myeloma include:

Resistance training or muscle strengthening exercises

Resistance training or muscle strengthening exercises use the resistance of your own body weight, a resistance band, or weights, to increase your muscle and bone strength.

When your body is out of condition, exercises where you are supported in a chair can be a good starting point to help you regain some mobility and fitness.

For example, try sitting in a sturdy and stable chair (like a dining room chair), with your feet flat on the floor and knees bent at right angles. Start with some slow, deep breaths, and then try some simple movements like straightening your knees, marching your feet in place, gently moving your arms, and stretching your upper body.

While heavy weight training is more beneficial for muscle and bone health, you'll need this to be designed and supervised by an EP or physio to make sure it's tailored to your needs and is safe for you.

If you have myeloma bone disease, your EP or physio will consider the location, size, and spread of this and prescribe activities that will help to strengthen your muscles and bones, whilst avoiding high impact, flexing, and twisting movements in areas of bone damage.

Many people find that gaining strength improves their self-esteem, body image, and general wellbeing. It can also help you with many everyday activities, like getting up from a chair or bed, carrying groceries, and climbing the stairs.

> ***I was surprised by how weak I was after my stem cell transplant. I found that moving my body every day, no matter how little, helped me regain my strength.***
>
> Roger, Queensland

> ***I've been working with an exercise physiologist to improve my strength and balance. It's been really empowering to feel my body respond to the training and my strength improve – and I have more energy after my exercise sessions.***
>
> Mia, Northern Territory

Learn more

- Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center has a helpful, illustrated guide to chair exercises.
- Visit Myeloma UK for an illustrated guide to resistance and strength exercises.

Walking

Walking is an easy and convenient way to exercise that suits many people living with myeloma. It's free, you can enjoy it in most weather, and you can choose to walk by yourself, with a group, or with a four-legged friend.

Walking uses large muscle groups, helps circulation and mobility, and gets you outdoors with all the benefits of fresh air and nature.

Remember to wear appropriate footwear to help keep you stable, use a walking aid if you need to, and avoid uneven ground, slippery surfaces, and poorly-lit areas.

Some people enjoy Nordic walking, which uses poles for stability and focuses on technique to maximise your stride.

Joining a walking group is a fabulous physical and social activity. Walking groups are a fun way to stay active and motivated, whilst meeting new people. Remember to talk to the group coordinator first to make sure the terrain suits your ability.

The Heart Foundation has over 1200 walking groups around Australia. Find your closest one at walking.heartfoundation.org.au

Stationary cycling

Stationary cycling helps to build strength and aerobic fitness, and you can exercise in any weather whilst watching TV, listening to podcasts, or reading. It's also a safer option than cycling outside.

Stationary bikes provide adjustable resistance where you can perform higher intensity bursts of cycling with short rest breaks in-between, which are great for your heart and lung health.

Tai chi, qigong and balance classes

Tai chi, qigong, and balance classes can help to improve balance, posture, strength, and flexibility. They can also help to reduce stress and fatigue, and are a good way to make new social connections.

Look for supervised classes that are gentle and suited for beginners, and make sure the instructor knows that you have myeloma and is aware of any issues (such as the location and severity of any bone lesions) that may affect which exercises are safe for you.

> ***I tried tai chi while having treatment and was surprised how energising it was, and how it worked my muscles without leaving me exhausted.***
>
> Sonia, Western Australia

Swimming

Swimming, and walking or running in water, help to build aerobic fitness without putting stress on your joints.

However, swimming isn't recommended if you have a central venous access device in place, such as a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) or Hickman line.

If your white blood cell counts are low or you are having radiation therapy, swimming in heated or public pools is not recommended due to the increased risk of infection.

> ***I joined a walking group and was interested to find that many of the members have various different health challenges – so I definitely didn't feel alone. The group really helps me to be accountable and turn up every week to walk – and we always have so much to chat about!***
>
> Aki, Tasmania

Are there any exercises or sports I should avoid?

There are some exercises and sports that may place unnecessary stress on your bones and joints, or increase the risk of fracture or injury, especially if you have myeloma bone disease.

It is usually best to avoid:

- **high impact exercises** and contact sports, such as football, rugby, netball, and squash
- **activities with a high risk** of falls, such as ice skating, roller skating or skiing
- **lifting weights** without the guidance of an EP or physio.

Depending on the location and extent of any bone lesions, playing golf may also need some special consideration because of the extreme rotating motion of the golf swing.

Chat to your EP or physio for more detailed and specific advice about exercise or sports that might pose risks for you, and ways to modify them to make them safer.

Are there any other considerations for exercise in myeloma?

There are some extra things you should consider to help make exercise as safe as possible when you have myeloma.

Pain: Stop exercising and see your doctor if you experience any new or worsening pain with exercise.

Low blood counts: Myeloma and its treatments can cause low levels of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. If you have low blood cell counts, check with your treating team to find out if the type of exercise you'd like to do might put you at risk of infections or bleeding.

If your white cell counts are low and you are at higher risk of infection, it's wise to avoid public swimming pools, saunas and spas, and take extra care when using public gyms.

Peripheral neuropathy: Myeloma and its treatments can cause nerve damage which may result in peripheral neuropathy, causing symptoms including pain, numbness, and burning or tingling in your hands and feet. Peripheral neuropathy can also affect balance, and cause dizziness. Take extra care with exercise if you have symptoms of peripheral neuropathy, and ask your EP or physio how you can modify exercises to make them safer.

Blood pressure: If you have a history of heart problems, and you have a home monitor, you can check your blood pressure before starting a higher intensity exercise session and spend longer on your warm-up and cool-down. If you start feeling dizzy or nauseous, stop to rest.

If you're interested in getting advice from an EP or physio, ask your GP to write you a Chronic Disease Management Plan.

The plan includes five sessions in a calendar year with allied health professionals, where Medicare will reimburse part or all of the cost of these visits.

Read more about these plans on page 75 of our booklet, *Myeloma: A comprehensive guide*.

Remember to check what the gap with each health professional will be so you're not surprised when it's time to pay.

> ***After I've had a swim or walk, I fall asleep more easily that night and sleep better and deeper.***
>
> Dot, Victoria

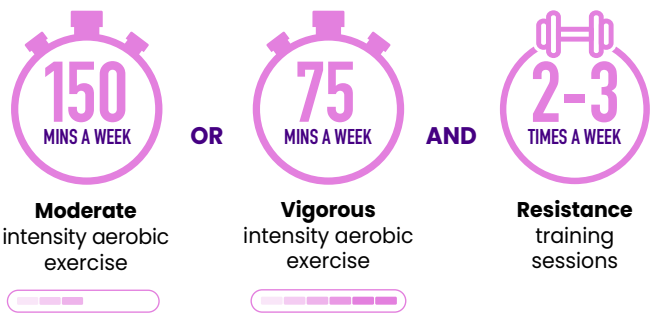
How often and how much should I exercise?

It's ideal to exercise on as many days of the week as possible.

Start with a small amount of exercise when you're feeling at your best or most energetic. Increase your amount of exercise a little each time, and aim to build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most days, increasing to vigorous exercise if you're able. Remember that 'something is better than nothing' and 'more is better than less' when it comes to physical activity.

Your EP, physio or treating team can provide you with more specific advice about the ideal amount and intensity of exercise for you.

> ***I've always been very active and was worried that my myeloma diagnosis would severely limit what I could still do. I may not be able to do everything I used to, but with the help of my exercise physiologist, I've been able to make small changes to the sports and exercise I love so I can stay active and social.***
>
> Simon, South Australia



Moderate intensity aerobic exercise

Vigorous intensity aerobic exercise

Resistance training sessions

Here are some ideas to help you exercise and stay motivated:

- **Start with** a small amount of regular exercise; consistency is key.
  - If you haven't exercised for some time or are very unwell, you might start with walking across the room a few times a day, then walking around the block, and then progress to finding a hill or stairs.
- **Listen to** your body and gradually increase the frequency, intensity, and duration of exercise a little bit each time.
- **Aim to** build this up to meeting the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's exercise guidelines:
  - at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic exercise each week, **and** two or three resistance training exercise sessions each week.
- **Make a regular commitment** to exercise, ideally with another person or as part of a group; this is a great way to motivate yourself to stick with your program.
- **Notice the feeling** of accomplishment and wellbeing you have after exercise (make a note in your diary or on your phone), and use this for motivation next time.

Learn more

You'll find more information about living as well as possible with myeloma in these resources available from myeloma.org.au:

RESOURCE	NAME	LINK
INFOSHEETS	→ 'Nutrition and myeloma living well infosheet' → 'Fatigue and myeloma living well infosheet' → 'Managing myeloma pain living well infosheet'	Go to: myeloma.org.au Search for the document using the name following the icons
RECORDED SEMINARS	→ *Wellness, Exercise and Nutrition*	Go to: myeloma.org.au/resources/ Click on **Recorded Seminars** to go to myeloma.org.au/resources/recorded-seminars/ Scroll down the Recorded Seminars page to find the relevant seminar.
PODCASTS	→ *Mye Conversations podcast*, Season 1, Episodes 7: 'Let's Keep Active!'. (Note that the EX-MED program mentioned in this podcast is not available at the moment)	Go to: myeloma.org.au/resources/ Click on **Podcasts** to go to myeloma.org.au/resources/podcasts/ Click on Season 1 tab to find the relevant episode.

More information and support

- **Search for an accredited exercise physiologist** by location, specialty, or name. Visit the Exercise & Sports Science Australia website: www.essa.org.au and click on 'ESSA Search'.
- **Search for a physio by location, specialty, or name.** Visit the Australian Physiotherapy Association search website: www.choose.physio.
- **Download Cancer Council Australia's booklet**, *Exercise for People Living with Cancer*.
  - Go to cancervic.org.au and search for 'exercise and cancer'.
- **Download Myeloma UK's illustrated guide of** *Exercises for myeloma patients*.
  - Go to myeloma.org.uk and search for 'Exercises for myeloma patients'.
- **Our Specialist Myeloma Nurses** are available on our Telephone Support Line to talk with you about any aspect of myeloma, its treatment and management.

  To book a 30- or 60-minute call with a Specialist Myeloma Nurse:

  call **1800 MYELOMA** (1800 693 566)
  Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm AEST/AEDT, or

  go to myeloma.org.au and click on the
  'Book a call with a Specialist Myeloma Nurse' button.

  email nurses@myeloma.org.au to contact a Specialist Myeloma Nurse at any time.

All the best with your exercise program.

We hope you soon start feeling the many benefits of building more movement into your days.

The information in this sheet is not intended to replace medical care or the advice of your treating team. Please talk to your accredited exercise physiologist or physiotherapist about exercises that are safe and best for you.