

Blood cancer



What is blood cancer?

Blood cancer occurs when blood cells aren't made properly. They grow out of control and spread throughout the bloodstream. They develop in the spongy bone marrow found in the middle of bones and interrupt the function of normal blood cells. The main types of blood cancers are lymphoma, leukaemia, myeloma, myelodysplastic syndromes and myeloproliferative diseases. Blood cancers represent approximately seven percent of all new cancer diagnoses worldwide.

How does exercise help with blood cancer?

People with blood cancer often endure lengthy therapies (e.g. chemotherapy) that reduce their physical capacity. Common side effects of blood cancer such as severe anaemia (abnormally low levels of red blood cells or haemoglobin) and thrombocytopenia (abnormally low levels of platelets) cause high levels of fatigue. High doses of corticosteroids and long periods of bed-rest, particularly during stem cell transplantation, lead to muscle wasting. Collectively, blood cancer and its treatment-related side effects reduce quality of life.

Exercise reduces fatigue and depression in people with blood cancer. More research is required to confirm whether there are additional benefits of exercise specifically in people with blood cancer. In saying that, exercise has demonstrated many important benefits in other cancer populations, which may also benefit people with blood cancer, such as:

- Increasing cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle strength and endurance and balance
- Improving physical function and ability to perform activities of daily living
- Improving bone health and reducing falls risk
- Improving cognitive function
- Improving quality of life.

Exercise also reduces the risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dementia.

Everyone with blood cancer should talk to their health professional about engaging in exercise, because it is important to engage in exercise in a way that is safe and will provide the most benefit to the individual.

Some people with blood cancer have changes to the bone that increases the risk of fracture. If you have bone problems consult an appropriately qualified exercise professional (Accredited Exercise Physiologist) to reduce your risk of falls and fractures. These exercise professionals will consider the location, size and spread of your bone issues and prescribe appropriate activities to strengthen your muscles and improve your balance whilst avoiding high impact, flexing and twisting movements in the areas of the bone damage.

What type of exercise is best for blood cancer?

People with blood cancer are recommended to progress towards and, once achieved, maintain participation in:

- At least 150 minutes of **moderate-intensity** or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise (e.g. walking, jogging, cycling, swimming) each week.
- Two to three **resistance exercise** (i.e. lifting weights) sessions each week involving moderate-to vigorous-intensity exercises targeting the major muscle groups.

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Always seek professional advice from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist. Find one here: www.essa.org.au/find-aep