



**World  
Physiotherapy**  
Europe region

**Factsheet –**

**Exercise During Chemotherapy:  
Essential Care for Active Cancer  
Treatment**

**Cancer Working Group**

**NOTED**

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**Pristina, Kosovo**

## **FACTSHEET – EXERCISE DURING CHEMOTHERAPY: ESSENTIAL CARE FOR ACTIVE CANCER TREATMENT**

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### **WHY EXERCISE DURING CHEMOTHERAPY?**

- Exercise improves physical fitness, reduces fatigue, and helps patients complete chemotherapy as planned<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Enhances chemotherapy effectiveness and may improve overall survival and disease control<sup>3-5</sup>.
- Reduces secondary side effects such as anxiety, depression, neuropathy, and supports better quality of life<sup>6,7</sup>.
- Encourages long-term recovery of strength, aerobic capacity, and cognitive health after treatment completion<sup>6</sup>.

### **HOW EXERCISE SUPPORTS CANCER TREATMENT**

- Synergistic with chemotherapy by improving tumour response and treatment tolerance<sup>8</sup>.
- Helps maintain muscle mass, which correlates with fewer side effects and better outcomes<sup>7</sup>.
- Aids in reducing hospital admissions and treatment interruptions<sup>2,10</sup>.

### **EXERCISE GUIDELINES FOR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS**

- Aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate aerobic activities (e.g., walking, cycling) combined with 2-3 sessions of resistance training<sup>11</sup>.
- Tailor intensity to patient tolerance, using tools like the "talk test" (moderate intensity = can talk but not sing).
- Start slowly and focus on consistency to avoid fatigue or injury. Even low-intensity activity produces benefits.
- Personalise programs based on cancer type, treatment phase, side effects, and patient preferences.

### **SPECIAL FOCUS: PROSTATE CANCER AND EXERCISE**

- Exercise during and after prostate cancer treatment improves physical function, reduces fatigue, enhances quality of life, and may decrease disease progression<sup>16</sup>.
- Resistance training is particularly effective to counteract muscle loss from androgen deprivation therapy.
- Aerobic and combined exercise programs are safe and recommended during chemotherapy phases for prostate cancer patients.

## PHYSIOTHERAPISTS' ROLE

- Educate patients and multidisciplinary teams about exercise as a foundational cancer treatment.
- Assess baseline fitness, monitor symptoms, and adapt exercise prescriptions to chemotherapy side effects.
- Advocate for integration of exercise in oncology care pathways.
- Support patients psychologically to overcome fear and barriers to activity during treatment.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Exercise is medicine during chemotherapy — it enhances treatment, reduces side effects, and supports survival.
- It should be integrated as an essential part of cancer care, prescribed, and supervised by trained physiotherapists.
- Personalised, consistent, and safe exercise regimens improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

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