

A/PROF PRUE CORMIE – WHY EXERCISE?

For many people diagnosed with cancer, exercise is the last thing they want to think about especially if they're going through intensive treatments. So why exercise?

Well, years of scientific investigation has established exercise as an invaluable tool to help counteract the adverse effects of cancer and its treatment. Research suggests that exercise may help patients live longer. People with breast, prostate and colorectal cancer who exercise regularly are approximately 10-60% less likely to die from their cancer than those who don't exercise. Regular exercise may also reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and can help patients tolerate higher dosages of cancer treatments. We know that exercise minimises the severity physical declines caused by cancer and leads to improvements in fitness, strength and balance that help make everyday activities easier to do. Exercise can also help reduce the severity of pain and negative changes in body weight, especially the loss of muscle and gains in fat mass. Even though it may seem counterintuitive, regular exercise helps counteract the persistent fatigue experienced by many cancer patients. And in fact patients who exercise regularly report higher levels of energy and vitality.

The benefits of exercise aren't limited to improvements in physical wellbeing but also extend to enhanced mental wellbeing. Regular exercise helps fight the depression, anxiety and stress commonly experienced by people with cancer. And many patients also report that exercise helps clear their mind and improve their mood. Importantly research has consistently shown that appropriately prescribed and monitored exercise leads to significant improvements in cancer patients' quality of life.

So how can exercise do all this? Exercise is an effective medicine because it improves the structure and function of most of the body's systems simultaneously. In fact, there is no medication or treatment that can positively influence as many body systems as exercise can. Undoubtedly, if the effects of exercise could be encapsulated in a pill, it would be the most widely prescribed medication in the world. And even if this pill had just a fraction of the positive health benefits regular exercise provides, it would be viewed as a miracle drug.

