

# Exercise and myeloma

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**This Infosheet describes why myeloma patients should exercise, what kind of exercises are suitable and some safety tips.**

Regular exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle and has many benefits for maintaining good health. It can boost energy levels, lessen fatigue, improve muscle strength, reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, increase appetite and improve quality of life. While you may not always feel like exercising, it doesn't necessarily mean training for a marathon. It is important

to maintain a certain level of physical activity to improve muscle tone and strength, which can be lost after long periods of rest and inactivity.

The type of exercise you can do safely depends on your individual circumstances, for example your symptoms, any complications of myeloma and its treatment, your age and your general fitness before diagnosis.

Some patients are very fit before their myeloma diagnosis whereas others will have been less active and so when it comes to exercising with myeloma, there is no one size fits all rule. Exercising is an important part of maintaining a good quality of life and you can certainly continue to exercise with myeloma. However, it is important to be aware of the impact that myeloma has on your body and to adjust your exercise routine accordingly.

You should always speak to your doctor before you start exercising, regardless of your fitness levels before diagnosis. They may be able to refer you to a physiotherapist who will be able to design a tailored exercise programme for you.

## Types of exercise

As myeloma can have a damaging effect on the bones, any type of exercise you do should have minimal impact on your bones. Some examples of exercises for myeloma patients include:

### Non-jarring aerobic exercise

Moderate exercise which helps to strengthen the heart and lungs but has a low impact on your bones and joints e.g. swimming, cycling or a using a cross-trainer.

## Range-of-motion exercises

Exercises which involve gentle movement, stretching and rotation of the limbs and body e.g. tai chi.

### Walking

High-impact exercises such as jogging, tennis, squash or golf should be avoided if you have bone damage, particularly in the spine, as these may put pressure on the spinal bones (vertebrae) and increase the risk of compression fractures.

It is also recommended that you avoid contact sports with myeloma, for example rugby.

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**For more information about suitable exercises, see the [Exercises for myeloma patients](#) Infosheet from Myeloma UK.**

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## Benefits of exercising with myeloma

During periods of treatment and when myeloma is active you may feel like exercising less and it is ok to have periods where you are less active. However, prolonged inactivity can lead to muscle weakness, making everyday activities like climbing stairs, getting in and out of the car and house work more difficult, demanding more energy and making you feel more tired.

Whenever possible, you should aim to return to normal daily physical activities as soon as possible following treatment as this will help to regain bone and muscle strength which can be lost after long periods of rest and inactivity.

Myeloma patients who maintain physical activity or exercise will be able to maintain or improve their fitness levels, making day to day activities easier.

Other benefits of regular gentle exercise include:

- Reducing fatigue and boosting energy levels
- Improving your range of movement
- Improving flexibility and balance
- Improving muscle tone and strength
- Decreasing bone pain
- Improving sleep
- Reducing feelings of anxiety and depression
- Increasing appetite
- Improving quality of life

The Myeloma - Advancing Survivor Cancer Outcomes (MASCOT) clinical trial is investigating how activity and fitness levels affect myeloma

patients' quality of life. Early reports from patients taking part in a physiotherapist-led exercise programme as part of the trial indicate that they are experiencing better quality of life than they had prior to joining the trial.

Speak to your doctor if you would like to be referred to a physiotherapist for advice on exercise.

### Frequency of exercise

You should aim to increase your physical activity slowly. Set yourself realistic and achievable goals and build up gradually until you are doing some form of exercise on a regular basis every few days. It is inevitable that you will have days when you feel more tired and other days when you have more energy. Try not to push yourself. Remember that improving fitness and mobility will take time and a little and often approach is best.

You should stop exercising and consult your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness or nausea
- A sharp pain in a specific area
- Increased fatigue or weakness

## Exercise safety tips

- Always speak to your doctor before starting any exercise programme or ask to be referred to a physiotherapist
- Avoid public gyms/swimming pools if you are at a higher risk of infection. This can occur if your white blood cell count is low, a potential complication of myeloma and a side-effect of some myeloma treatments. You are also at higher risk of infection after high-dose therapy and stem cell transplantation
- Minimise activities which have an increased risk of falling or jarring such as walking on uneven ground, especially if you have any altered sensation or numbness in your feet caused by peripheral neuropathy
- Avoid lifting heavy weights
- Wear supportive, laced shoes that fit well for exercising and make sure your trousers or skirt don't trail on the ground
- Always make sure your exercise space is clear and free of clutter
- Stop to rest if you are feeling breathless, don't push yourself too hard

- Stop immediately if you feel any new or increasing pain and let your doctor or nurse know
- Build up gradually, a little and often approach to exercising is best
- Pace yourself and listen to your body

## Summary

Exercise has many of the same benefits for myeloma patients as it does for healthy individuals and is encouraged. However it is important to listen to your body and to build up your exercise routine gradually.

## About this Infosheet

The information in this Infosheet is not meant to replace the advice of your medical team. They are the people to ask if you have questions about your individual situation. All Myeloma UK publications are extensively reviewed by patients and healthcare professionals prior to publication.

## Other information available from Myeloma UK

Myeloma UK has a range of Essential Guides, Infoguides and Infosheets available covering many areas of myeloma, its treatment and management.

To order your free copies or to talk to one of our Myeloma Information Specialists about any aspect of myeloma, call the **Myeloma Infoline: 0800 980 3332** or **1800 937 773** from Ireland

The Myeloma Infoline is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm and is free to phone from anywhere in the UK and Ireland. From outside the UK and Ireland, call **0131 557 9988** (charged at normal rate).

Information and support about myeloma is also available around the clock at **[www.myeloma.org.uk](http://www.myeloma.org.uk)**

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**Myeloma Awareness Week 21 - 28 June**