

The Importance of Exercise  
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Over 60% of patients with multiple myeloma (MM) are anemic at diagnosis. Nearly all become anemic during aggressive treatment for MM and many require red blood cell transfusions. Anemia can contribute to fatigue, the most common and often the most distressing symptom for patients with cancer. Is there anything that can help with cancer-related fatigue?

Many randomized trials with repeated measures have compared the effects on fatigue and performance of a home-based exercise program that combines aerobic and strength resistance training. The preliminary findings suggest that exercise therapy during aggressive treatment for MM benefits patients by decreasing their fatigue and improving their overall performance status.

An additional benefit for individuals with multiple myeloma is exercise can reduce the loss of calcium from the bones and help prevent additional breakdown and fractures.

Before beginning an exercise program it is important to discuss plans with the doctor treating your myeloma and get clearance for anything you plan to do. Because bone involvement is quite common with myeloma, it is important to take into account the location of the involved bones in order to determine what type of exercise is safest.

Any exercise program should aim to achieve three goals: strength, flexibility, and endurance. Most exercises that increase strength are quite safe, in moderation (1-5 pound weights.) Flexibility exercises are best performed when the muscles are warm, so you should do them at the end of exercising for example following a walk or swim. Endurance can be achieved with a 15-20 minute daily walk. Keep in mind that the key to any safe and effective exercise program is careful and regular consultation with your doctor.

In general, exercise will help boost your body's tolerance to chemotherapy and radiation treatment, enable you to gain a sense of physical control over the condition, optimize the function of your immune system, improve your emotional and psychological outlook, and it will stimulate your motivation and drive for optimal wellness.