

# New exercise guidelines for people with cancer

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Credit: University of Queensland

A decade-old treatment recommendation for people with cancer to take a "slowly slowly" approach to exercise has been replaced with new guidelines recommending a personalised exercise program including high-intensity workouts to achieve the best treatment outcome.

Led by QUT Research Fellow Professor Sandi Hayes, researchers from

QUT and Edith Cowan University (ECU) have just published the Exercise and Sports Science Australia's (ESSA) Position Statement on Exercise Medicine in Cancer Management in the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*.

Professor Hayes said ten years ago, in the ESSA's first position statement on the topic, the best advice for people with cancer was to follow a generic [exercise program](#) of low to moderate intensity, with three to five sessions per week including aerobic, resistance or a mixture of both.

But in the past decade evidence has challenged that advice.

Professor Hayes said the research that had emerged since the release of the first position statement demonstrated the benefit to cancer outcomes \_ including specific treatment-related side effects, such as lymphoedema and fatigue \_ which could be achieved with a targeted approach to [exercise](#) prescription.

One of the key changes in the new recommendations is that the guidelines no longer have a generic exercise program recommendation of a specified number of workouts a week.

"Research in this space has exponentially grown and consequently, the updated position stand now provides the foundation for Accredited Exercise Physiologists to ensure their exercise prescription is targeted towards improving cancer outcomes," Professor Hayes said.

"While for the majority of [cancer patients](#), moderate to high intensity exercise will likely be appropriate, there is no set prescription and total weekly dosage that would be considered evidence-based for all cancer patients."

"Precision medicine is about optimising patient outcomes. This position statement allows for precision medicine through exercise."

Director of ECU's Exercise Medicine Research Institute and co-author of the statement Professor Daniel Galvão said: "No one [cancer](#) patient is the same as another. Therefore, there is no 'one size fits all' exercise prescription."

"The type, duration, frequency, intensity and total volume of exercise prescription needs to be tailored to the patient's needs and priorities," Professor Galvão said.

"This position statement uses evidence, alongside best practice, to determine who needs what type, intensity, frequency and duration of exercise and when.

"For example, for patients with a low level of fitness, or those with advanced stage disease, a starting exercise prescription may need to involve multiple short bouts of five to ten minutes, to accumulate at least 20 minutes on any given day.

"As exercise capacity improves, progression towards longer sessions of at least 20 minutes duration on most days of the week is recommended."

**More information:** Sandra C. Hayes et al, The Exercise and Sports Science Australia position statement: Exercise medicine in cancer management, *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jsams.2019.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2019.05.003)

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