

Exercise could help one of prostate cancer treatment's most-common and devastating side effects

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Prostate cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer in the world, but not only does it put the lives of those diagnosed at risk, but can also severely impact patient quality of life due to side-effects of treatment.

One such side-effect commonly reported by patients is [sexual dysfunction](#)—however, a new long-term [clinical trial](#) led by Edith Cowan University (ECU) and presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology Breakthrough Meeting in Japan, has revealed there is a therapy which may help combat this aspect of battling the disease:

ECU Exercise Medicine Research Institute (EMRI) Director and study lead Professor Daniel Galvao said nearly half of patients with [prostate cancer](#) report having unmet sexual health care needs.

"Sexual dysfunction is a common, distressing, and persistent side effect of [prostate cancer](#) treatment, with both physical and psychological effects," Professor Galvao said. "Our study shows these patients can immediately benefit from supervised [exercise](#) interventions to improve their sexual health."

It comes after previous EMRI studies found [exercise can help produce cancer fighting proteins](#) called myokines, which act to suppress tumor growth even in [late-stage](#), terminal prostate cancer patients.

"This is just the latest piece of evidence showing exercise should be considered an integral part of treatment for prostate cancer," Professor Galvao said.

Hit the exercise training

Spanning four years, the study split more than 100 prostate cancer patients into three groups.

One group undertook supervised resistance and [aerobic exercise](#), while another did the same exercise program but also underwent psychosexual therapy.

The third group received standard treatment without any exercise or therapy component.

The psychosexual therapy resulted in no improvements in erectile function or intercourse satisfaction—however the exercising patients reported a big improvement in both.

Those who exercised saw erectile function increase by 5.1 points, compared to 1.0 point for the usual care group, while intercourse satisfaction increased by 2.2 points with exercise and 0.2 points with usual care.

Exercise also prevented an increase in fat mass and improved physical function outcomes, as well as upper and lower body muscle strength compared to usual care.

Professor Galvao said more research was needed to investigate how exercise may impact prostate cancer patients' [sexual health](#) and other symptoms and side effects of the disease and its treatment.

"This study shows exercise can have a positive effect on [erectile dysfunction](#) as a treatment side effect, which is a primary concern men report," he said.

"In the broader sense, we also know self-reliance, physical strength and well-being is important to men's health and important in the context of an aging patient group prone to co-morbid chronic illness; an exercise program speaks directly to strength and well-being."

Time to get moving

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia CEO Anne Savage said the organization hoped to see the findings rapidly translated into practice.

"This research is a call to action for men and their partners impacted by prostate cancer and adds weight to the recommendation that exercise should be routinely prescribed for men affected by the disease," she said.

"The loss of erectile function is a major life stress for many thousands of Australian men being treated for prostate cancer each year.

"This study proves the power of exercise in helping restore sexual function while improving overall health, building on earlier research which has found that exercise can also help to reduce the risks of recurrence in men with prostate cancer."

Cancer Prevention and Research Director Melissa Ledger said it was exciting to see the research recognized internationally.

"Cancer Council WA is committed to achieving the best outcomes for cancer patients and their families, so it's important for us to support research such as Professor Galvao's that has the potential to improve and save lives," Ledger said.

"We're delighted to learn our early support laid the foundations for further research projects—and the results speak for themselves."

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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