

Exercise found to reduce menopausal symptoms in cancer survivors

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Physical activity can reduce the severity of early menopausal symptoms in women who have had cancer treatment, a University of Queensland study has found.

Dr. Tom Bailey from UQ's School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work said the results showed a clear association between [physical activity](#) and an easing in menopausal symptoms.

"Women who remained physically active and met guidelines for more intense physical activity, reported fewer symptoms associated with the menopause," Dr. Bailey said.

"The main benefits were reduced [depressive symptoms](#) and reduced somatic symptoms, such as nausea, dizziness, tiredness, muscle and joint pain, as well as some improvement in sleep patterns and sexual function."

Dr. Bailey said menopausal symptoms were common in women treated for early-stage breast, reproductive and [blood cancers](#).

"Menopausal symptoms arise when radiotherapy to the pelvic field, [surgical removal](#) or systemic chemotherapy damage the ovaries, initiating ovarian failure," he said.

"In women who are premenopausal or perimenopausal before treatment, cancer therapies result in a sudden and sometimes irreversible menopause, the symptoms of which can be far more frequent and severe than in natural menopause.

"Women often report treatment-induced menopausal symptoms as a distressing side effect that goes on long after they resume their usual work and social roles."

The Women's Wellness After Cancer Program trialled a digitally-delivered holistic lifestyle intervention for women treated for early stage breast, reproductive and blood cancers.

More than 350 women treated for such cancers within the past two years took part in the study.

Lifestyle behaviours targeted in the program included physical activity, nutrition, sleep, stress management, smoking cessation and reduction of alcohol intake.

Dr. Bailey said the results of the trial could help inform future programs for cancer services that do not currently provide post-treatment support.

"There are currently no programs tailored for the menopausal symptoms that eventuate from these types of cancer treatments and many women are unable to, or decide not to take hormone therapy, as it may exacerbate cancer growth," he said.

"Supervised and individualised exercise training that improves cardiovascular and physical fitness could be of most benefit in women for alleviation of [menopausal symptoms](#), and we hope to investigate

this next.

"Undertaking regular moderate to vigorous physical activity has also been shown to reduce the risk of other treatment-related chronic conditions, mortality, and cancer recurrence."

The study is published in the journal *Menopause*.

More information: Tom G. Bailey et al. Physical activity and menopausal symptoms in women who have received menopause-inducing cancer treatments, *Menopause* (2020). [DOI: 10.1097/GME.0000000000001677](https://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000001677)

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