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Four Cochrane reviews on different exercise types for fatigue in people with cancer

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Background: Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is the most prevalent and severe symptom experienced among cancer patients. It impacts both physical and mental well-being and is not relieved by rest. Research indicates that exercise may improve CRF.

Methods: We conducted four Cochrane systematic reviews to assess the impact of three exercise modalities (i.e., cardiovascular training (CT), resistance training (RT), yoga) on CRF and secondary outcomes in people with cancer before, during, after anticancer therapy with short-, medium- and long-term follow up. We included randomised controlled trials (RCTs) with structured training, at least five sessions, and face-to-face instruction. We followed standard Cochrane methodology, utilized the Cochrane Risk of Bias 1 tool for bias assessment and the GRADE approach for certainty assessments. Data were pooled by follow-up period; results were meta-analysed where applicable.

Results: We searched 8 databases including CENTRAL and MEDLINE up to October 2023. Our search yielded 7182 records, of which we included 71 RCTs across all reviews. Most studies examined breast cancer patients. No included studies evaluated exercise before anticancer therapy. During anticancer therapy, findings indicate that CT and RT may reduce short-term CRF (moderate certainty). Results for yoga and CT versus RT remain uncertain (very low certainty). After anticancer therapy, findings indicate a positive effect of yoga on short-term CRF (moderate certainty). Evidence for CT, RT and CT versus RT was uncertain. For medium- and long-term CRF, evidence was uncertain during and after anticancer therapy for all exercise modalities.

Discussion: The reviews identified a lack of evidence on exercise before anticancer therapy and on safety outcomes. Evidence on haematological malignancies is severely underrepresented. Furthermore, there is a lack of reporting on whether a fatigue diagnosis had already been made before the intervention starts.

Keywords

exercise, cancer, cancer-related fatigue

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

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yes

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