Jreissati Pancreatic Centre

Epworth

Staying active
during treatment

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Acknowledgements

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The Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country across Australia. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, communities and culture.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Note to readers

This booklet provides general information about pancreatic cancer. It is not intended to replace advice from your treating team or other qualified professionals. You should always speak with your doctor about decisions that may affect your health. If you require legal, financial or psychological support, we encourage you to seek advice from appropriately trained specialists.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information is accurate at the time of publication. However, evidence and clinical guidance relating to cancer care are continually evolving. The Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth is not responsible for any loss, injury or damage resulting from reliance on this material.

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VICTORIAN CANCER AGENCY

VICTORIA State Government

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About the Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth

Pancreatic cancer is the eighth most diagnosed cancer in Australia. In 2025, it was estimated that 4,825 people would receive a pancreatic cancer diagnosis. This would account for 2.8% of all cancer diagnoses in the country.[1]

The Jreissati family are all too familiar with the fear and uncertainty that follow a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, having lived through the experience when Elias was diagnosed at age 54. Knowing the impact the disease has had on their family, Elias, his wife Colleen and the rest of the Jreissati family wanted to change the patient and family experience for others. This led to the establishment of the Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth in 2021. This Centre provides clinical care and support to patients with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, supports early diagnosis and better patient outcomes, advocates for patients and raises awareness and understanding of the disease. 100% of the funding it receives is directed into research, patient support and clinical care.

Our centre comprises three intersecting parts, each of which is integral to improving patient outcomes and experiences

- Comprehensive patient-centred clinical care
- Patient advocacy and support
- Clinical trials and research

We are a specialist centre offering a centralised model of care for pancreatic disease management. This means our patients have access to all healthcare professionals required for their care within a single centre and hospital network. International studies support the view that centralised care improves overall patient outcomes.[2] By managing patients through one main centre, case volume increases, which in turn enhances clinical expertise. This growing expertise drives innovation and leads to advances that will improve patient procedures and treatments in the future.

The **patient experience** is a central focus of our centre. Receiving a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can be an overwhelming and emotional time, often bringing many questions and uncertainties. Knowing that you are not facing this alone, and understanding where to turn for support, is very important. Once you are referred to the centre, you will meet our pancreatic nurse coordinator, who will be there to guide and support you throughout your care at Epworth. They will be your first point of contact and are always available to answer any questions or concerns you or your family may have.

Staying active during treatment

Staying active during pancreatic cancer treatment can support your physical and mental wellbeing. Even gentle movement can assist with fatigue, digestion, mood and recovery. You do not need to follow a structured exercise program. The aim is to find forms of movement that feel safe and manageable for your situation.

This booklet outlines the potential benefits of physical activity during treatment, the types of movement that may be suitable, and how to adjust your activity depending on how you feel. It also includes practical tips on pacing, safety, and when to speak with a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist.

Everyone's circumstances are different. Start small, take your time, and focus on what feels appropriate for you.

This resource does not replace medical advice. Always speak with your healthcare team about decisions that may affect your care.

Why gentle exercise can help

You may not feel like moving much during cancer treatment, particularly if you are managing fatigue, pain or other side effects. However, even light physical activity can support your recovery and overall wellbeing.

Potential benefits of gentle activity include:

- Improving energy levels and reducing fatigue
- Supporting digestion and easing symptoms such as bloating or constipation
- Boosting mood and reducing anxiety
- Helping maintain muscle strength and joint movement
- Supporting circulation, balance and sleep
- Aiding recovery after surgery or during treatment breaks

You do not need to follow a structured program or exercise every day. Short walks, light stretching or simple activities around the home can still be helpful.

The aim is to move in a way that feels manageable. You do not need to push yourself. Any movement, even in small amounts, can make a difference.

Types of exercise that may be suitable

The right type of activity will depend on your energy levels, treatment stage, and any physical limitations. It's okay to start small. Even a few minutes of gentle movement can be helpful.

Common options include:

Type of activity	Examples	How it may help
Walking	Around the block, inside the house, or in a garden	Can improve circulation, boost mood and support digestion
Stretching	Gentle arm, leg, neck or back stretches	Helps maintain flexibility and reduce stiffness
Strength exercises	Light hand weights, resistance bands, sit-to-stand	Helps preserve muscle tone and bone strength
Balance exercises	Heel-to-toe walking, standing on one leg	Can reduce the risk of falls and improve confidence
Breathing or relaxation	Seated breathing exercises, yoga or tai chi	Supports stress management and mental wellbeing

Some people find it helpful to do small bursts of movement across the day, rather than one longer session.

If you are unsure what's safe or appropriate, ask your care team for advice or a referral to an exercise physiologist or physiotherapist.

Adjusting activity during treatment and recovery

Your ability to stay active may vary from day to day. Some days you may feel able to move more, while on others you may need to rest. This is normal. The key is to listen to your body and adjust your activity accordingly.

After surgery

In the first few weeks after pancreatic surgery, gentle movement can help reduce the risk of complications and support your recovery.

- Take short walks around the house or hospital ward as soon as it is safe
- Avoid lifting heavy objects or doing strenuous activity until your surgeon advises it is safe
- Gentle stretches or breathing exercises may support movement and reduce discomfort
- Increase your activity gradually as you regain strength, with advice from your care team

During chemotherapy or radiotherapy

Side effects from treatment may affect your energy, appetite and immune function.

- Try light activity on days when you feel well enough
- Avoid activity if you feel unwell, have a fever, or feel faint
- Choose seated or low-intensity movement if you feel unsteady
- Rest when you need to, and do not try to push through fatigue

It is okay to pause or adjust your routine during more difficult weeks. Even small amounts of activity can help maintain strength and support recovery between treatments.

Tips for listening to your body

Your energy and strength may vary from day to day during treatment. Paying attention to how you feel can help you stay active without overdoing it.

Practical tips:

- **Start small:** Begin with short sessions, such as 5 to 10 minutes of gentle activity. Increase gradually if it feels manageable.
- **Use the 'two-hour check':** If you still feel very tired two hours after an activity, you may have done too much. Try a shorter or gentler session next time.
- **Pace yourself:** Spread out tasks during the day and take regular breaks. Avoid trying to do everything at once.
- **Alternate movement with rest:** Gentle movement between rest periods may ease stiffness and improve how you feel.
- **Keep a simple record:** Note what activities you do and how you feel afterwards. This can help you recognise patterns and adjust your routine.

Stop and rest if you feel unwell, dizzy, breathless or in pain. Let your care team know if these symptoms continue.

Safety considerations

Physical activity can support your wellbeing during treatment, but it is important to take care and adapt based on your health and symptoms. Some side effects can affect how and when it is safe to exercise.

Things to consider:

- **Lower immunity:** If your white blood cell count is low, avoid crowded places such as gyms or group classes. Wash your hands before and after activity.
- **Neuropathy (numbness or tingling):** If you have changes in sensation in your hands or feet, take extra care with balance and coordination. Use support as needed to reduce the risk of falls.
- **Fatigue:** Choose low-impact activity and rest when needed. You may need to adjust your usual routine.
- **Recovery after surgery:** Follow your team's advice about when it is safe to lift, bend, or resume more active movement.
- **Pain or discomfort:** Stop activity if you feel unwell or develop new or worsening symptoms. Speak with your team if pain continues.

When to speak with your care team:

- Before starting a new exercise or activity program
- If you are unsure what types of movement are safe for you
- If any symptoms or side effects increase after being active

Your team can also refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist with cancer experience. They can help you create a safe and individualised plan.

When to see an exercise physiologist or physio

An exercise physiologist or physiotherapist can help you stay active safely during and after cancer treatment. They can design a program that suits your health, treatment plan and personal goals.

You may benefit from seeing one if you:

- Are recovering from surgery and unsure where to begin
- Feel weak, unsteady or have reduced muscle strength
- Have treatment side effects such as fatigue, nerve symptoms or joint pain
- Have other health conditions that make activity more complex
- Would like support to stay motivated and build confidence

These professionals understand how cancer treatment affects the body. They can work with your healthcare team to support safe recovery and movement.

Support may be available through public hospitals, cancer centres or community health services. You may also be eligible for Medicare rebates, private health insurance claims, or access under a chronic disease management plan arranged by your GP.

Key takeaways

This booklet has provided practical tips to help you stay active during treatment. If you are unsure what is safe for your situation, speak with your care team. Support is available to help you find an approach that suits your needs.

There is no one-size-fits-all routine. Some days you may feel well enough for a short walk or light stretches. On other days, sitting outside or moving around the house may be all you can manage. Both are valid forms of activity.

During treatment, even small efforts can make a difference. What matters is finding movement that feels safe and achievable for you.

Key points to remember:

- Movement is not all-or-nothing. Every effort counts
- Start small and adjust based on how you feel
- Focus on flexibility, balance, or breathing if energy is low
- Short sessions throughout the day may be more manageable than one longer session
- Speak with your team if you want support or a referral to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist

Contact us

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pancreaticcentre.org.au

Glossary

Activity program: A plan or routine that includes specific movements or exercises to help improve physical health.

Balance exercises: Movements that improve stability and help reduce the risk of falls, such as standing on one leg or walking heel-to-toe.

Breathing exercises: Simple techniques to help you breathe more deeply and relax. These may include slow, controlled breaths or guided breathing sessions.

Chronic disease management plan: A type of care plan arranged by your GP to support long-term health conditions. It may include referrals to allied health professionals like exercise physiologists.

Exercise physiologist: A health professional trained in designing safe, personalised exercise plans for people with medical conditions, including cancer.

Fatigue: A feeling of ongoing tiredness or exhaustion that is common during cancer treatment and may not improve with rest.

Flexibility: The ability to move your joints and muscles through their full range. Stretching can help maintain flexibility and reduce stiffness.

Low immunity: When your body has fewer white blood cells, making it harder to fight off infections. This can happen during chemotherapy or other cancer treatments.

Neuropathy: Numbness, tingling or pain in the hands or feet caused by nerve damage from treatment. It can affect balance and coordination.

Pacing: A way of managing your energy by breaking up tasks, resting regularly, and avoiding doing too much at once.

Physiotherapist: A health professional who helps with movement, strength, and recovery after illness or surgery.

Resistance exercises: Movements that build strength using resistance from weights, bands, or body weight. These help maintain muscle and bone health.

Side effects: Unwanted symptoms caused by treatment, such as fatigue, pain, or nausea.

Strength exercises: Activities that help build or maintain muscles, such as sit-to-stand movements or lifting light weights.

Additional resources

Financial and legal advice

Cancer Council's Financial Assistance Program

Provides advice and support on a variety of topics including legal issues, financial planning, small business accounting, workplace (HR or recruitment) advice.

13 11 20

cancer.org.au/support-and-services/practical-and-financial-assistance

Community Legal Centres Australia

Provides links to local community legal centres across Australia.

clcs.org.au/legal-help

Cancer Council's Dealing with Debt factsheet

Information for people who are having trouble paying their debts.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/dealing-with-debts

Services Australia's Financial Information Service

Information on employment, disability, sickness and carer payments.

132 850

servicesaustralia.gov.au

Type 'Financial Information Service' in the search box

Cancer Council's Help with Bills factsheet

Explains options to help you pay your utility bills, including rebates, discounts, and concessions

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/help-with-bills-factsheet

Money Smart

Financial tips from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC). Includes the Financial Advisers Register.

1300 300 630

moneysmart.gov.au

State Trustees

Public Trustees who can help you prepare a will and manage your finances. Contains links to public trustees by state and territory.

willshub.com.au/succession-law-resources/public-trustees/

Cancer Council's Superannuation and Cancer factsheet

Advice on finding and accessing super, tax implications of accessing super, and super-related insurance.

cancercouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Superannuation-and-Cancer.pdf

Counselling and mentoring services

Canteen

Free counselling and emotional support to young people and their families who are impacted by cancer.

1800 226 833

canteen.org.au

Care Search

Australian Government website that provides palliative care information and links to services for people affected by cancer.

caresearch.com.au

Kids Helpline

Telephone and online counselling service and crisis support for young people aged 5–25.

1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

Pancare support groups

Online and face-to-face support groups for patients and carers.

1300 881 698

pancare.org.au/living-well/support-groups/upper-gastrointestinal-cancer-support-groups

Pankind Support Navigator

(02) 7207 6970

support@pankind.org.au

Telephone support groups

The below telephone support groups are free, professionally facilitated support groups. They are open groups and you can join in whenever you feel well enough, on an ongoing basis, from anywhere in Australia.

Members are telephoned by Cancer Council so there are no costs to participate. You can be called on a landline or a mobile.

The Pancreatic Telephone Support Group meets the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and accepts new members at any time.

The Advanced Cancer Telephone Support Group meets the first and third Tuesday of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and is for people with a variety of cancers, including pancreatic cancer.

The Carers' Telephone Support Group meets the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and is for people caring for someone with any cancer, including pancreatic cancer.

To find out more about any of these telephone support groups, 1300 755 632 or email tsg@nswcc.org.au.

Medicare Safety Nets thresholds

Medicare Safety Nets have thresholds. When you spend certain amounts in gap and out-of-pocket costs, you may reach these thresholds. Once you've reached the thresholds, you'll begin to receive higher Medicare benefits. This means you'll receive more money back for certain Medicare-funded services.

servicesaustralia.gov.au/what-are-medicare-safety-nets-thresholds

Please make sure you register so that your payments are counted towards the threshold.

Information for carers

Carer Gateway

Links carers to local support services such as emergency respite care, counselling and peer support groups. Offers practical information, resources and support packages for carers.

1800 422 737

carergateway.gov.au

Carers Australia

National body working with state and territory Carers Associations to provide information and counselling for carers.

1800 242 636

carersaustralia.com.au

Advance care planning

Advance Care Planning Australia

Information about planning for your future healthcare, including advance care directives.

1300 208 582

advancecareplanning.org.au

My Values

A set of specially constructed statements designed to help you identify, consider and communicate your wishes about the medical treatment you would want in the later stages of life.

myvalues.org.au

Helpful guides and factsheets

Cancer Council's Employment and Cancer factsheet

This fact sheet answers some common questions people have about their rights. It explains federal employment laws and protections under anti-discrimination laws.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/employment-and-cancer

Cancer Council's Getting your Affairs in Order factsheet

Instructions on making a will, preparing documents that will help others to make decisions for you if you're not able to make them yourself, nominating a beneficiary for your superannuation and insurance, and sorting out legal and financial paperwork.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/getting-your-affairs-in-order-factsheet

My Aged Care

Established by the Australian Government to help you find and access the right government-funded aged care services.

You can call the My Aged Care Contact Centre on 1800 200 422.

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturdays 10am to 2pm

myagedcare.gov.au

References

1. Cancer Australia, *Pancreatic cancer in Australia statistics*, Cancer Australia, 2025, accessed 1 December 2025.
2. OO Faluyi, JL Connor, M Chatterjee, C Ikin, H Wong and DH Palmer, 'Advanced pancreatic adenocarcinoma outcomes with transition from devolved to centralised care in a regional Cancer Centre', British Journal of Cancer, 2017, 116:424-431.

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CONSUMER REVIEWED

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