

Newsletter

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Cancer-Related Fatigue (CRF)

Fatigue is one of the most common side-effects of cancer and its associated treatments. CRF differs from “normal” fatigue in that it is not relieved by sleep or rest. CRF has been linked with a patient's ability to complete treatment, to participate in valued activities, and can undermine overall quality of life. While fatigue will improve following treatment completion for most, many will continue to struggle with fatigue for many months/years after treatment. Of note, low levels of

physical activity post-treatment have been linked to persistent fatigue. Although fatigue is often presented as a barrier to exercise, a strong and growing body of evidence has shown that tailored exercise interventions are more effective than pharmaceutical (prescription medications) options and are often recommended as a first-line therapy.

Research Profile

Exercise for Cancer to Enhance Living Well (EXCEL)

Similar to ACCESS, EXCEL is a free 12-week exercise program designed to lessen the impact of a cancer diagnosis and its treatment(s) on the health and well-being of individuals confronted with the disease. Funded by the Canadian Cancer Society and Canadian Institute of Health Research Cancer Survivorship Team Grant, EXCEL is a pan-Canadian study that will facilitate the delivery of supportive exercise programming to those who do not currently have access to such programming within their local communities. EXCEL will strive to increase accessibility by providing participants with both in-person and virtual (online) programming.



PAC Champion

Dr. Stephanie Snow has been a staff Medical Oncologist at the QEII hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia since 2010 and is currently an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie. After pursuing undergraduate training at McGill, she completed her MD, Internal Medicine and Medical Oncology training at Dalhousie. She treats head and neck, thoracic and GI malignancies. Dr. Snow has a strong interest in Medical Education, and is a member of the Royal College Medical Oncology Examination Board. She participates in clinical research and is involved with patient advocacy serving as the VP of Lung Cancer Canada, in addition to working as a medical advisor to numerous other cancer advocacy groups for colorectal and gastric cancer.

So many of my patients are interested in being physically active, and know the benefits for cancer patients, but they really struggle with the concept of “not overdoing it”. So many of them are struggling to maintain a healthy weight, and others have cancer that impairs their breathing. ACCESS and EXCEL has really opened their worlds, as they feel comfortable and safe expanding their physical and mental wellbeing. The virtual component has done so much to equalize access to support for physical activity regardless of whether a patient lives rurally or in downtown Halifax. The biggest problem we’ve faced is that everybody wants to continue in the program once their time is over!



Meet our Team



My name is Tom Christensen. My favourite things to do include playing outside, cooking, borrowing my parents’ dogs, and taking care of the animals on the farm. I’m currently living in Winnipeg but am pursuing my Master’s in Kinesiology at Dalhousie under PAC’s Dr. Melanie Keats and working as an exercise physiologist in both the ACCESS and EXCEL programs. I’m thrilled to be a part of the PAC lab because it allows me to do one of the things I love most: helping people improve, maintain, and enjoy their health and fitness. My master’s research involves bringing caregivers into our exercise programs so that we can care for their health too. I envision caregivers becoming included in exercise programming and in the cancer care model more generally in the not-too-distant future and hope my research generates more support for making exercise and *caring for caregivers* a regular part of cancer care.

Tip of the Month

When it comes to our health and our fitness, one of the biggest favours we can do ourselves is to accept where we are right now. It doesn’t matter whether we’re totally new to exercise, seasoned athletes, dealing with a setback due to illness or injury, or anywhere in between. No matter where we are, we can work on maintaining or improving our health and fitness. This might involve building on the good things we’ve done in the past or learning some new habits that will help us in the future. Health and fitness are the result of practicing healthy behaviours consistently over time—and it’s never too late or too soon to start working on them! If we accept where we are right now, it’s a lot easier to get to where we want to be tomorrow. For some additional tips on getting active, check out the recent article “Gain without Pain” in the Spring 2021 DAL Magazine ([DAL-MAG-S21 Issuu.pdf](#)).