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### Targeting exercise interventions to patients with cancer in need

**Citation for published version:**

Buffart, LM, Sweegers, MG, May, AM, Chinapaw, MJ, van Vulpen, JK, Newton, RU, Galvao, DA, Aaronson, NK, Stuiver, MM, Jacobsen, PB, Verdonck-de Leeuw, IM, Steindorf, K, Irwin, ML, Hayes, S, Griffith, KA, Lucia, A, Herrero-Roman, F, Mesters, I, Weert, EV, Knoop, H, Goedendorp, MM, Mutrie, N, Daley, AJ, McConnachie, A, Bohus, M, Thorsen, L, Schulz, K-H, Short, CE, James, EL, Plotnikoff, RC, Arbane, G, Schmidt, ME, Potthoff, K, Beurden, MV, Oldenburg, HS, Sonke, GS, Harten, WHV, Garrod, R, Schmitz, KH, Winters-Stone, KM, Nollet, F, Wenzel, J, Wiskemann, J, Brug, J & Courneya, KS 2018, 'Targeting exercise interventions to patients with cancer in need: An individual patient data meta-analysis', *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, vol. 110, no. 11, dji161, pp. 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/dji161>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1093/jnci/dji161](https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/dji161)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Journal of the National Cancer Institute

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## **Targeting exercise interventions to patients with cancer in need: an individual patient data meta-analysis**

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**Running head:** Targeting exercise to patients with cancer: an IPD-meta-analysis

**Keywords:** neoplasm; exercise; quality of life; fatigue; muscle strength; aerobic capacity; physical function; physical activity

## **ABSTRACT**

**Background** Exercise effects in cancer patients often appear modest, possibly because interventions rarely target patients most in need. This study investigated the moderator effects of baseline values on the exercise outcomes of fatigue, aerobic fitness, muscle strength, quality of life (QoL) and self-reported physical function (PF) in cancer patients during and post-treatment.

**Methods** Individual patient data from 34 randomized exercise trials (n=4,519) were pooled. Linear mixed-effect models were used to study moderator effects of baseline values on exercise intervention outcomes, and to determine whether these moderator effects differed by intervention timing (during versus post-treatment).

**Results** Moderator effects of baseline fatigue and PF were consistent across intervention timing, with larger effects in patients with worse fatigue ( $p=0.05$ ) and worse PF ( $p=0.003$ ). Moderator effects of baseline aerobic fitness, muscle strength and QoL differed by intervention timing. During treatment, effects on aerobic fitness were larger for patients with better baseline aerobic fitness ( $p=0.002$ ). Post-treatment, effects on upper ( $p<0.001$ ) and lower ( $p=0.01$ ) body muscle strength and QoL ( $p<0.001$ ) were larger in patients with worse baseline values.

**Conclusion** Although exercise should be encouraged for most cancer patients during and post treatments, targeting specific subgroups may be especially beneficial and cost-effective. For fatigue and PF, interventions during and post-treatment should target patients with high fatigue and low PF. During treatment, patients experience benefit for muscle strength and QoL regardless of baseline values, however, only patients with low baseline values benefit post-treatment. For aerobic fitness, patients with low baseline values do not appear to benefit from exercise during treatment.

## INTRODUCTION

There is evidence from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that exercise has beneficial effects on fatigue, physical fitness, quality of life (QoL) and self-reported physical function (PF) during and post cancer treatment(1-7). The magnitude of these effects, however, is often small to moderate(2, 3, 8-10). One explanation for these modest effects may be the lack of specifically targeting those patients who are most likely to benefit from exercise interventions. For other types of supportive care interventions, such as psychosocial interventions, larger effects on distress and QoL are often found in patients with higher distress(11-13) and lower QoL(14). Consequently, some RCTs have screened for distress prior to enrolling patients into a psychosocial intervention(15-18). In our previous meta-analysis on individual patient data (IPD), we found that 36% of RCTs evaluating the effects of psychosocial interventions specifically targeted patients with psychosocial symptoms and, in general, these RCTs showed larger intervention benefits(19). Thus, targeting psychosocial interventions to patients with worse symptoms and QoL seems useful and economical. Whether this principle is also the case for exercise interventions is unknown.

Only a limited number of exercise intervention studies have evaluated the moderator effect of baseline fatigue, physical fitness (i.e. aerobic fitness and muscle strength), QoL and PF on intervention effects in patients with cancer(20-24). Studying these moderator effects may help to identify subgroup of patients *for whom* exercise interventions are especially beneficial or futile(25, 26). Results from previous RCTs have shown that the effects of exercise interventions on fatigue were larger in patients with higher baseline fatigue(22, 23). Also, exercise intervention effects on QoL were larger in patients who had completed chemotherapy with higher baseline fatigue(20), and in patients with lymphoma with lower baseline QoL(21). Comparably, in patients undergoing allogeneic stem cell transplantations, larger effects on physical fitness were found in unfit patients compared with fit patients(27).

The aims of exercise interventions differ across the cancer continuum. Exercise interventions during primary cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy, typically aim to prevent declines in functioning and to ameliorate treatment side-effects, while exercise interventions post-treatment aim to improve functioning(28). Therefore, it may also be important to identify *when* targeting exercise interventions to baseline values of fatigue, physical fitness, QoL and PF would be most useful. Since it may be important to prevent declines in functioning during primary cancer treatment in all patients regardless of baseline functioning, we studied whether the benefit from exercise during cancer treatment was independent of baseline value. Conversely, post-treatment, we hypothesized larger benefits on fatigue, physical fitness, QoL and PF in patients with worse baseline values.

Using data collected in the Predicting Optimal cAncer Rehabilitation and Supportive care (POLARIS) study(26), this IPD meta-analysis aimed to study the moderator effects of baseline values on the exercise response for fatigue, physical fitness, QoL and PF, and to examine whether these moderator effects differ by intervention timing (during versus post-treatment).

## **METHODS**

### *Study inclusion and characteristics*

The POLARIS study is an international collaboration in which IPD of RCTs were harmonized for pooled analyses(26). POLARIS included RCTs that evaluated the effects of exercise and/or psychosocial interventions on QoL compared to a wait-list, usual care or attention control group in adult ( $\geq 18$  years) patients with cancer. Eligible studies were identified via systematic searches in electronic databases, reference checking of systematic reviews, meta-analyses and via personal communication with collaborators, colleagues and other experts in the field. Details of the study design, procedures, search strategies, study inclusion, sample

and quality have been published previously(4, 26). The study protocol was registered in PROSPERO in February 2013 (CRD42013003805).

IPD from 34 (n= 4,519 patients) of 69 RCTs (response 49%) evaluating the effects of exercise were included(4). These 34 RCTs were a representative sample of the published RCTs evaluating exercise intervention effects on QoL and PF(4). The moderator effects of demographic, clinical, and intervention-related variables for QoL(4), physical fitness(6), and fatigue(7) are reported elsewhere.

### *Exercise interventions*

Details of the different exercise interventions have been published previously(4). Study-, intervention-, and exercise-characteristics of included studies and pre-intervention values of fatigue, physical fitness, QoL, and PF are presented in Table 1. Of 34 RCTs, 17(29-45) focused on patients with breast cancer, five(46-50) on various cancer types, five(23, 51-54) on prostate cancer, three(55-57) on hematological cancer, one(58) on colorectal cancer, and one(59) on lung cancer. Two RCTs(60-63) included patients with breast and colon cancer, of which results were published in separate reports. Three RCTs specifically targeted patients with menopausal symptoms(33), lymphedema (risk)(42) or multiple physical or psychosocial problems(49), but no studies specifically targeted patients with fatigue, low fitness, or poor QoL. Fourteen(23, 32, 35, 36, 38-40, 43-45, 47, 52-54) RCTs excluded patients who participated in regular physical activity or exercise.

### *Outcome variables*

The current analyses used outcomes assessed at pre- and post-intervention. Table 2 presents the different measures used to assess the outcomes. Fatigue, QoL and PF were assessed by self-report. Physical fitness was measured objectively by assessing aerobic fitness, upper



(UBMS) and lower body muscle strength (LBMS). To allow pooling of the different measures or questionnaires, we recoded the individual scores (pre- and post-intervention) into z-scores by subtracting the mean pre-intervention score from the individual score and dividing the result by the standard deviation (SD) pre-intervention per measurement instrument. Subsequently, the pooled z-scores were used for further analyses.

### *Statistical analysis*

Moderator effects of the baseline value of the outcome were studied using a one-step approach. Linear mixed model analyses with a two-level structure (1:patient, 2:study) were used to consider the clustering of patients within studies by using a random intercept on study level. The post-intervention value (z-score) of the outcome was regressed on the intervention, and adjusted for the baseline value (z-score) to limit regression to the mean(64, 65).

Moderator effects were examined by adding the interaction term of the moderator variable with the intervention into the regression model. We added a 3-way interaction of intervention×baseline value×intervention timing, along with the three corresponding 2-way interactions to the model, and intervention timing. A significant 3-way interaction indicates that the moderator effects of the baseline value of the outcome differ between interventions offered during versus post cancer treatment. In this case, we tested the moderator effects separately for interventions during and post cancer treatment. In case the 3-way interaction was not significant, the moderator effect of the baseline value (baseline value×intervention) was tested in the total group (i.e. both during and post-treatment). We used the likelihood ratio test to compare models with and without interaction terms. Additionally, regression coefficients, 95% confidence intervals (CI), and corresponding p-values of the interaction term were examined. In case the model improved significantly by adding the interaction term or in case the interaction term was significant, stratified analyses were conducted for

intervention timing, and for subgroups of baseline fatigue, aerobic fitness, UBMS, LBMS, QoL and PF. For 2-way interactions, we considered  $p \leq 0.05$  as significant. For 3-way interactions, we chose a cut-off of  $p \leq 0.10$  to reduce the risk for missing potential moderator effects. For the stratified analyses, we categorised the baseline values into four groups of SD scores ( $< -1SD$  vs.  $-1SD$  to mean vs.  $\geq$  mean to  $1SD$  vs.  $> 1SD$ ). The SD scores can be translated to the scores of the original measurement instrument of interest. All analyses were adjusted for age, sex and cancer type. Because supervised exercise showed to have larger effects on all outcomes compared to unsupervised exercise(4, 6, 7), we conducted sensitivity analyses in the subgroup of patients that had received a supervised exercise intervention.

## RESULTS

Baseline values of fatigue, physical fitness, QoL, and PF are presented in Table 2. As also reported previously(4, 6, 7), linear mixed model analyses showed that exercise significantly reduced fatigue ( $\beta = -0.17, 95\%CI = -0.22; -0.12, p < 0.001; I^2$  for heterogeneity = 37.83,  $p = 0.02$ ) and improved aerobic fitness ( $\beta = 0.28, 95\%CI = 0.22; 0.33, p < 0.001; I^2 = 81.02, p < 0.001$ ), UBMS ( $\beta = 0.18, 95\%CI = 0.13; 0.24, p < 0.001; I^2 = 65.58, p < 0.001$ ), LBMS ( $\beta = 0.27, 95\%CI = 0.22; 0.33, p < 0.001; I^2 = 84.69, p < 0.001$ ), QoL ( $\beta = 0.15, 95\%CI = 0.10; 0.19, p < 0.001; I^2 = 18.07, p = 0.18$ ) and PF ( $\beta = 0.18, 95\%CI = 0.13; 0.23, p < 0.001; I^2 = 38.10, p = 0.01$ ) overall, compared to the control condition.

Three-way interactions were (borderline) significant for aerobic fitness ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.04$ ), UBMS ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.10$ ), LBMS ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.05$ ) and QoL ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.07$ ), but not for fatigue ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.89$ ) and PF ( $p_{\text{interaction}} = 0.65$ ). These interactions indicate that the moderator effects of the baseline values of aerobic fitness, UBMS, LBMS, and QoL

differed between exercise interventions offered during versus post cancer treatment, whereas they did not differ for fatigue and PF (Table 3).

Across intervention timing, baseline PF significantly moderated the exercise intervention effect on PF ( $p_{\text{interaction}}=0.003$ ) and baseline fatigue moderated the exercise intervention effects on fatigue ( $p_{\text{interaction}}=0.05$ ). The exercise intervention effect on PF was significant when baseline PF was less than 1SD above the mean (Table 4;Figure 1). The exercise intervention effect on fatigue was significant when baseline values of fatigue were equal or larger than 1SD below the mean (Table 4;Figure 1).

For exercise interventions during treatment, we found that the exercise intervention effect on aerobic fitness was moderated significantly by its baseline value ( $p_{\text{interaction}}=0.002$ , Table 2), such that patients with low baseline aerobic fitness ( $<-1$  SD below mean) did not significantly benefit from the exercise intervention, whereas larger benefits were found in patients with higher aerobic fitness at baseline (Table 4;Figure 2).

For exercise interventions post-treatment, baseline values of UBMS ( $p_{\text{interaction}} <0.001$ ), LBMS ( $p=0.01$ ), and QoL ( $p_{\text{interaction}} <0.001$ ) significantly moderated the exercise intervention effects (Table 3). Stratified analyses of the exercise intervention effects post-treatment showed larger effects on UBMS and LBMS for patients with baseline values below the mean, whereas effects on QoL were particularly pronounced for patients with baseline values of at least 1SD below the mean (Table 4;Figure 3).

Results of the sensitivity analyses in patients who had received supervised exercise interventions were only slightly different. The moderator effect of the baseline value of aerobic fitness during cancer treatment was less pronounced ( $\beta_{\text{interaction}}=0.07$ , 95%CI=-0.01;0.16, $p=0.08$ ). Additionally, for UBMS, the difference in the moderator effect of baseline values between interventions during and post cancer treatment was larger ( $\beta_{3\text{-way interaction}}=-0.21$ ,95%CI=-0.32;-0.09, $p<0.001$ ), but it did not change the conclusions.

## DISCUSSION

In this IPD-meta-analysis, we investigated whether the effects of exercise interventions during treatment on fatigue, physical fitness, QoL and PF were equally effective across patients with different baseline values, and whether the effects of exercise interventions on these outcomes post-treatment were larger in patients with worse baseline values. We found that baseline values did not significantly moderate the exercise intervention effect on these outcomes during cancer treatment except for aerobic fitness. For exercise interventions post cancer treatment, baseline values of UBMS, LBMS, and QoL moderated the exercise intervention effect on these outcomes, with stronger effects in patients with worse baseline values, and no significant benefits for patients with baseline values  $>1$  SD above the mean. For aerobic fitness, we found larger effects of exercise interventions during treatment in patients with higher baseline aerobic fitness, whereas baseline values did not moderate the exercise intervention effects post-treatment. Larger effects on fatigue and PF were found for patients with worse baseline fatigue and PF, both during and post-treatment.

Our findings may have important clinical implications for identifying which subgroups of patients may benefit the most or the least from exercise during and post cancer treatment for these specific outcomes. Although exercise should be encouraged for most patients with cancer(66), our results indicate that depending on the aim of the exercise intervention, certain subgroups of patients may not gain benefits for certain outcomes. Exercise interventions during treatment are effective in maintaining UBMS, LBMS, and QoL, regardless of the baseline value. Offering exercise interventions post-treatment to patients with a relatively high UBMS, LBMS and QoL ( $>1$  SD above the mean on respective measures) does not appear to further improve these outcomes. A previous RCT in patients with lymphoma during or post chemotherapy also found larger effects on QoL in patients with lower baseline

values(21), but this study did not disentangle differences in the moderator effects across timing of intervention delivery.

Our finding that exercise interventions during cancer treatment showed better effects on aerobic fitness in patients with higher baseline aerobic fitness was unexpected and counterintuitive. The stratified analysis showed, however, that it was only patients with values lower than 1 SD below the mean who did not benefit significantly. This finding suggests that a minimum level of aerobic fitness may be needed to obtain an aerobic fitness response to an exercise intervention during cancer treatment. Perhaps, despite often being tailored to an individual's capacity, exercise interventions during intensive cancer treatments may be too difficult for patients with low aerobic fitness, resulting in lower adherence. Previous studies have found aerobic fitness to be a predictor of exercise adherence during chemotherapy(67-69). Lower adherence to exercise during chemotherapy in patients with lower aerobic fitness may be caused by more comorbidities, toxicities, illness or fatigue(67, 69, 70), as well as by limited exercise history(71) or low muscle strength(69). This may particularly be the case for unsupervised exercise, as our sensitivity analyses indicated that the moderator effect of baseline aerobic fitness was less pronounced for supervised exercise. A second possible explanation may be an inadequate exercise stimulus to improve aerobic fitness, either because exercise specialists may be too conservative when tailoring the exercise intervention to patients with low fitness during treatment, or that, related to variations in methods used to prescribe exercise intensity, patients may not be able to reach prescribed intensity targets(72, 73). Future studies should clarify if and how patients with low aerobic fitness can adhere and benefit from exercise interventions during cancer treatment. They should study how to better tailor exercise interventions during treatment to patients with low aerobic fitness, or whether it is better to offer these patients an aerobic exercise intervention after completion of cancer treatment, as this was shown to be effective for patients with various baseline fitness levels in

the current meta-analysis. The discrepancy between findings for muscle strength and aerobic fitness may indicate that it is more feasible for patients with low muscle strength to perform resistance exercises during cancer treatment than for patients with low aerobic fitness to perform aerobic exercises.

In contrast to objective measures of physical fitness, larger exercise intervention effects were found for self-reported PF for patients with worse baseline values, regardless of intervention timing. Although physical fitness and PF are related, they are not the same constructs, and may therefore produce different results(74). Our data suggest that exercise interventions may improve patient reports of PF during and post cancer treatment in patients with low PF, whereas the influence of the patient's objectively assessed baseline muscle strength and aerobic fitness on the intervention effects on these outcomes differed across intervention timing. This non-linear relationship between objective functional capacity (i.e. physical fitness) and patient-reported performance (i.e. physical function) indicates that improved capacity is not necessarily a prerequisite for improved patient-reported functioning(75), and that improving PF may also require behavioral changes, adaptations to the physical environment or support from the social environment(76). Additionally, symptoms such as fatigue may also influence self-reported functioning, regardless of physical fitness(77).

Our finding that patients with worse baseline fatigue had larger fatigue reductions supports results of previous explorative studies in patients who completed cancer treatment(20, 22), and in patients during androgen deprivation therapy(23). This finding highlights the importance of targeting subgroups of patients whose fatigue is 1SD worse than the mean value, as they may benefit the most from exercise with respect to fatigue. Results showed that exercise will neither benefit PF of patients with high baseline values (>1SD above mean), nor will it benefit fatigue in patients with low symptoms of fatigue (<1SD

below mean). Obviously, post cancer treatment, there is no or little room for improvement in these symptoms if they are not present or only marginally present. Perhaps during treatment, patients with no or minimal symptoms (often post-surgery) are not prone to developing them, and therefore, no significant preventive effects of exercise are found for these measures. The lack of appropriately targeted interventions in previous studies may have underestimated the effects of exercise, particularly on fatigue and PF, and post-treatment. Future studies should therefore consider targeting exercise interventions to specific subgroups of patients. More recent exercise studies have begun to target patients with symptoms such as arthralgia(78), and fatigue(79), and to tailor exercise prescriptions to key physiological characteristics, such as bone health and muscle strength(80).

Strengths of this IPD meta-analyses include the large sample size, allowing us to assess the moderator effects with interaction tests, using uniform analytic procedures across all RCTs, and to conduct subsequent stratified analyses. However, some caution is warranted in generalizing these results to all patients with cancer. The IPD study population may be somewhat biased towards patients with breast cancer and to those who are more interested in exercise and may have fewer comorbidities(81), less fatigue(63, 81, 82) and distress(83), and higher QoL(82). Additionally, this paper focused exclusively on fatigue, physical fitness, QoL and PF. Moderator effects of baseline values of other relevant outcomes, including depression, sleep, and menopausal symptoms, and long term health outcomes (e.g. cardiovascular risk, cancer recurrence, and survival) should be investigated in future studies. Finally, there was considerable heterogeneity in the content of the exercise interventions, the measures to assess the outcomes with potentially different psychometric properties and responsiveness, and the types of cancer treatments. Therefore, our findings on moderator effects of baseline values should be confirmed in large single studies with homogeneous patient populations, uniform treatment protocols, and validated outcome measures.

In conclusion, the effects of exercise interventions post cancer treatment on UBMS, LBMS and QoL appear to be larger in patients with worse baseline values, whereas exercise interventions during cancer treatment are equally effective for these outcomes, regardless of baseline values. This finding indicates that, when using exercise for rehabilitation after cancer treatments, it may be useful to target specific exercise interventions to patients with low muscle strength and poor QoL. Likewise, when aiming to benefit fatigue and PF during and post cancer treatment, exercise interventions should be targeted to patients with high levels of fatigue and low levels of PF, as they show the most benefits on these outcomes. Further research is necessary to identify how to improve aerobic fitness in patients with low aerobic fitness during cancer treatment. Although exercise is likely beneficial for most patients with cancer, exercise interventions targeted to specific subgroup of patients stand to have the largest impact on patient outcomes and the highest cost-effectiveness.

## **FUNDING**

This work was supported by the Alpe d'HuZes foundation/Dutch Cancer Society (VU 2011-5045), via the "Bas Mulder Award" granted to L.M. Buffart

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

none

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**Table 1.** Descriptives of study-, intervention-, and exercise-characteristics of included studies (n=34), and baseline values of outcomes of participants (n=4,519).

	Number of studies	Number of participants in these studies
<b><i>Study characteristics</i></b>		
Country		
United States	8	860
The Netherlands	7	1360
Australia	6	899
Canada	4	518
Germany	4	367
United Kingdom	3	360
Spain	1	16
Norway	1	139
Sample size		
0 – 100	13	799
>100 – 200	13	1678
>200 – 300	7	1712
>300	1	330
Cancer type <sup>a</sup>		
Breast cancer	19	2754
Mixed cancer types	5	819
Prostate cancer	5	426
Haematological	3	311
Colon cancer	3	158
Lung cancer	1	51
<b><i>Intervention characteristics</i></b>		
Intervention timing		
Pre-during-post cancer treatment	1	80
During and/or post cancer treatment	3	418
During cancer treatment	13	1808
During chemotherapy	4	820
During radiotherapy	1	141
During chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy	4	524
During androgen deprivation therapy	4	326
Post cancer treatment	17	2213
Intervention delivery mode <sup>b</sup>		
Supervised	25	3091
Unsupervised	10	1513
Intervention Duration		
≤ 12 weeks	13	1523
12 – 24 weeks	11	1824
>24 weeks	10	1172
Type of control group <sup>c</sup>		
Usual care	19	2582
Wait-list	9	1364
Attention Control	7	607
<b><i>Exercise characteristics</i></b>		
Frequency, times per week <sup>b</sup>		
2	19	2742
3 – 4	8	1081
≥ 5	6	730
Unknown	1	51
Intensity <sup>d</sup>		
Low-moderate	2	327
Moderate	13	1528
Moderate-high	16	1926
High	2	389
Unknown	3	525
Type <sup>e</sup>		

Aerobic exercise	12	1374
Aerobic + resistance exercise	16	2253
Resistance exercise	5	774
Resistance + impact exercise	4	332
Mean session duration <sup>f</sup>		
0 – 30 min	10	1486
>30 – 60 min	19	2479
>60 min	4	502
Unknown	2	137
Outcome measure		
Fatigue	31	4366
Aerobic fitness	21	2742
Upper body muscle strength	19	2546
Lower body muscle strength	18	2258
Quality of life	34	4519
Physical function	34	4519

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<sup>a</sup>n+2, because two(60-63)RCTs included patients with breast and colon cancer with separate reports. <sup>b</sup>n+1, because one RCT(62) included both a supervised (2 times per week) and an unsupervised (5 times per week) exercise study arm. <sup>c</sup>n+1 because one RCT(32) included both a usual care and an attention control group. <sup>d</sup>n+2, because one RCT(62) included a moderate intensity and moderate-high intensity study arm, and another RCT(48) included both a moderate and a vigorous intensity exercise study arm. <sup>e</sup>n+3, because one RCT(62) had combined aerobic and resistance exercise study arm and an aerobic exercise study arm, one RCT(31) had an aerobic exercise and a resistance exercise study arm, and one RCT(23) had a combined resistance and aerobic exercise study arm and a combined resistance and impact loading exercise arm. <sup>f</sup>n+1 because one RCT(62) had a study arm with 30 min/session and one with 60min/session.

**Table 2.** Instruments used to assess the outcome measures and the baseline values.

	Number of studies (references)	Mean (SD) total sample <sup>a</sup>	Mean (SD) during treatment	Mean (SD) post-treatment
<b>Fatigue (n=4,272)</b>				
FACIT	8 (30, 31, 34, 38, 41, 51, 55, 58)	37.1 (11.0)	36.0 (11.5)	39.1 (9.6)
MFI, general fatigue	6 (48, 49, 56, 57, 60-62)	12.1 (4.3)	10.7 (4.1)	13.5 (4.0)
EORTC QLQ-C30, fatigue	5 (23, 37, 50, 52, 53)	29.1 (22.3)	24.9 (19.3)	32.3 (23.8)
SF-36, vitality	4 (29, 33, 36, 42)	55.3 (18.7)	50.0 (9.5)	55.7 (19.2)
Schwartz Cancer Fatigue Scale	3 (44, 45, 54)	10.4 (3.9)	9.8 (4.0)	10.6 (3.9)
FAQ, total	2 (40, 43)	38.4 (21.8)	38.4 (21.8)	N/A
Revised Piper Fatigue Scale	2 (32, 47)	2.7 (1.9)	2.4 (2.0)	3.1 (1.8)
CIS, total	1 (46)	57.0 (26.1)	57.0 (26.1)	N/A
Missing, n=94				
<b>Aerobic fitness (n=2,322)</b>				
PeakVO <sub>2</sub> , ml/kg/min	11	23.5 (7.2)	22.4 (7.1)	24.2(7.0)
Directly	8 (30, 31, 37, 48, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61)			
Indirectly via a submaximal exercise test	2 (32, 50)			
Directly or indirectly, based on patient's Preference	1 (47)			
400 meter walk test, s	4 (23, 51-53)	272.6 (49.4)	268.4 (50.4)	282.3 (53.8)
6 minute walk test, m	2 (57, 59)	441.9 (109.2)	N/A	441.9 (109.2)
12 minute walk test, m	1 (38)	986.3 (222.8)	986.3 (222.8)	N/A
Endurance test at 70% of Wmax, s	1 (62)	743.7 (530.0)	743.7 (530.0)	N/A
Modified Balke test, s	1 (58)	367.3 (291.1)	364.0 (300.1)	383.2 (269.5)
Steptest, heartrate in beats per minute	1 (34)	120.4 (16.0)	120.4 (16.0)	N/A
Missing: n=2				
<b>Upper body muscle strength (n=2,255)</b>				
Chest press, 1 repetition maximum in kg	10 (23, 31, 39, 42, 51-54)	34.0 (16.4)	44.2 (16.1)	24.5 (9.5)
Handgrip strength, in kg	4 (30, 48, 56, 60, 61)	35.8 (10.3)	32.9 (7.4)	37.3 (11.2)
Elbow flexion with handheld dynamometer, in Nm	1 (62)	29.9 (12.4)	29.9 (12.4)	N/A
Chest press, number of repetitions at 30-35% body mass	1 (35)	0.1 (0.5)	N/A	0.1 (0.5)
Sum upper body muscle strength (4 groups), in N	1 (57)	154.1 (50.6)	N/A	N/A
Sum of left and right grip strength, kg	1 (58)	70.5 (22.5)	71.9 (21.8)	68.9 (23.6)
Upright row and shoulder press, stage	1 (34)	6.8 (3.1)	6.8 (3.1)	N/A
Missing, n=79				
<b>Lower body muscle strength (n=2,056)</b>				
Leg press, 1 repetition maximum in kg	9 (23, 39, 42, 44, 45, 51-54)	101.9 (43.6)	124 (51.6)	89.8 (32.7)
Quadriceps torque, in Nm	5 (32, 40, 43, 56, 60, 61)	104.6 (35.7)	103.3 (28.5)	107.5 (47.8)

Leg extension, 1 repetition maximum in kg	1 (31)	54.9 (26.6)	54.9 (26.6)	N/A
Knee extension with handheld dynamometer, in Nm	1 (62)	67.6 (19.1)	67.6 (19.1)	N/A
Leg press, number of repetitions at 100-110% body mass	1 (35)	13.5 (7.2)	N/A	13.5 (7.2)
Sum of lower body muscle strength (4 groups), in N	1 (57)	186.1 (58.7)	N/A	N/A
Missing: n= 107				
<b>Quality of life (n=4,419)</b>				
EORTC-QLQ-C30, global QoL	17 (23, 35, 40, 43-46, 48-54, 56, 59-61)	69.6 (19.0)	71.7 (18.7)	67.8 (18.7)
FACT-G, total score	10 (29-32, 34, 36, 38, 41, 55, 58)	81.3 (14.3)	79.2 (14.6)	84.1 (13.5)
SF-36, general health	6 (33, 37, 42, 44, 45, 47)	66.3 (19.6)	52.6 (13.9)	68.7 (19.8)
Cares-SF, global QoL	1 (39)	48.2 (9.1)	N/A	48.2 (9.1)
Missing, n=100				
<b>Physical Function (n=4,433)</b>				
EORTC-QLQ-C30, physical function	17 (23, 35, 40, 43-46, 48-54, 56, 59-61)	83.4 (16.1)	86.7 (14.5)	79.6 (16.5)
FACT-G, physical well-being	10 (29-32, 34, 36, 38, 41, 55, 58)	21.9 (5.4)	20.6 (5.9)	23.7 (3.9)
SF-36, physical function	6 (33, 37, 42, 44, 45, 47)	81.6 (17.6)	85.6 (14.4)	80.9 (18.0)
Cares-SF, physical function	1 (39)	46.6 (7.0)	N/A	46.6 (7.0)
Missing, n= 86				

<sup>a</sup>The SD values of the total group can be used to interpret the effect sizes, which are expressed in SD scores.

Abbreviations: CARES-SF=Cancer Rehabilitation Evaluation System-Short Form; CIS=Checklist Individual Strength; EORTC QLQ-C30= European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire-Core 30; FACIT= Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy – Fatigue; FACT-G= Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-General; FAQ= Fatigue Assessment Questionnaire; MFI= Multidimensional Fatigue Inventory; N/A= not applicable; peakVO<sub>2</sub>= peak oxygen uptake; SF-36= Short Form-36 Health Survey.

**Table 3.** Moderator effects of baseline values for the total group or stratified for interventions during and post cancer treatment in case of significant moderator effect of timing.

Variable	3-way interaction		Moderator effect in total group		Moderator effect during cancer treatment		Moderator effect post cancer treatment	
	p of LR test	$\beta_{\text{interaction}}$ (95%CI)	P of LR test	$\beta_{\text{interaction}}$ (95%CI)	P of LR test	$\beta_{\text{interaction}}$ (95%CI)	P of LR test	$\beta_{\text{interaction}}$ (95%CI)
Fatigue	0.89	0.007 (-0.10; 0.11)	0.05 <sup>#</sup>	-0.05 (-0.10; 0.000)	-	-	-	-
Aerobic fitness	0.04*	-0.11 (-0.22; -0.004)*	-	-	0.002*	0.11 (0.04;0.18)	0.95	0.002 (-0.08;0.08)
UBMS	0.10 <sup>#</sup>	-0.10 (-0.21; 0.02)	-	-	1.00	-0.00 (-0.09;0.09)	<0.001*	-0.11 (-0.17;-0.05)
LBMS	0.05 <sup>#</sup>	-0.12 (-0.24; 0.002)	-	-	0.57	0.02 (-0.06;0.10)	0.01*	-0.10 (-0.18;-0.02)
QoL	0.07 <sup>#</sup>	-0.09 (-0.19;0.006)	-	-	0.38	-0.03 (-0.11;0.04)	<0.001*	-0.13 (-0.19;-0.06)
PF	0.65	-0.02 (-0.12;0.08)	0.003*	-0.07 (-0.12;-0.03)	-	-	-	-

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , <sup>#</sup> $0.05 < p \leq 0.10$ . Analyses are adjusted for age, sex and cancer type.

Abbreviations: CI= confidence intervals; LBMS= lower body muscle strength; LR= likelihood ratio; PF= physical function; QoL= quality of life; UBMS= upper body muscle strength



**Table 4.** Exercise intervention effects on outcomes for the total group and stratified per subgroup based on baseline standard deviation score, in case of significant moderator effects of the baseline values.

	Overall effect	<1 SD below mean	1 SD below mean to mean	mean to 1SD above mean	>1 SD above mean	P for trend
	$\beta$ (95% CI)	$\beta$ (95% CI)	$\beta$ (95% CI)	$\beta$ (95% CI)	$\beta$ (95% CI)	
<b>All studies</b>						
Fatigue <sup>a</sup>	-0.17 (-0.22; -0.12)* (n=3846)	-0.03 (-0.13; 0.08) (n=649)	-0.17 (-0.25; -0.09)* (n=1430)	-0.20 (-0.30; -0.11)* (n=1124)	-0.22 (-0.37; -0.07)* (n=643)	<0.001
PF	0.18 (0.13; 0.23)* (n=3984)	0.27 (0.11; 0.42)* (n=649)	0.22 (0.11; 0.34)* (n=890)	0.19 (0.12; 0.25)* (n=1727)	0.03 (-0.07; 0.12) (n=718)	<0.001
<b>During cancer treatment</b>						
Aerobic fitness	0.25 (0.18; 0.33)* (n= 1374)	0.07 (-0.12; 0.26) (n=211)	0.20 (0.09 0.31)* (n=510)	0.32 (0.22; 0.43)* (n=453)	0.38 (0.15; 0.60)* (n=200)	<0.001
UBMS	0.25 (0.16; 0.35)* (n=1106)	-	-	-		
LBMS	0.29 (0.20; 0.37)* (n=1019)	-	-	-		
QoL	0.15 (0.07; 0.22)* (n=1914)	-	-	-		
<b>Post cancer treatment</b>						
Aerobic fitness	0.33 (0.24; 0.41)* (n=843)	-	-	-		
UBMS	0.10 (0.04; 0.15)* (n=904)	0.21 (0.12; 0.30)* (n=168)	0.19 (0.13; 0.25)* (n=458)	-0.04 (-0.16; 0.08) (n=180)	-0.06 (-0.17; 0.06) (n=98)	<0.001
LBMS	0.26 (0.18; 0.34)* (n=646)	0.38 (0.25; 0.51)* (n=89)	0.30 (0.21; 0.39)* (n=363)	0.20 (-0.01;0.40)# (n=129)	0.03 (-0.33; 0.40) (n=65)	<0.001
QoL	0.15 (0.09; 0.21)* (n=1960)	0.36 (0.17; 0.55)* (n=311)	0.19 (0.06; 0.32)* (n=538)	0.12 (0.03; 0.21)* (n=741)	-0.02 (-0.13; 0.08) (n=370)	0.012

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , # $0.05 < p \leq 0.10$ . Analyses are adjusted for age, gender and cancer type

<sup>a</sup>Higher scores on the fatigue scale indicate more fatigue

Abbreviations: CI= confidence intervals; df= degrees of freedom; LBMS= lower body muscle strength; PF= physical function; QoL= quality of life; SD= standard deviation; UBMS= upper body muscle strength

**Figure 1.** Stratified subgroup effect of exercise interventions based on pre-intervention standard deviation (SD) score for baseline values of physical function (black bars) and fatigue (white bars) during and post cancer treatment.

**Figure 2.** Stratified subgroup effects of exercise interventions based on pre-intervention standard deviation (SD) score for the baseline value of aerobic fitness during treatment.

**Figure 3.** Stratified subgroup effects of exercise interventions based on pre-intervention standard deviation (SD) score for baseline values of upper body muscle strength (black bars), lower body muscle strength (white bars) and quality of life (dashed bars) post cancer treatment.