

## REVIEW ARTICLE

## Open Access Journal



# Exercise and Non-Communicable Diseases: Part II Cancer, Diabetes Mellitus, Kidney Diseases, Alzheimer's Disease, Arthritis

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### Abstract

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading global cause of death and disproportionately afflict those living in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Healthy lifestyle behaviors, including eating a high-quality diet, non-smoking, engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity, and drinking alcohol in moderation, have been associated with a lower risk of NCDs, a decline in worsening, and a reduction in associated mortality. The first part of this two-part series discussed exercise and its effects on cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, obesity, depression, and liver ailments. This second part discusses the deleterious effects of smoking on five non-communicable diseases, viz., cancer, diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, Alzheimer's disease, and arthritis. This manuscript highlights the benefits of exercise, in reducing the incidence, progression, and premature mortality of NCDs.

Keywords: exercise, non-communicable diseases, cancer, diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Exercise (or lack of it) is fast becoming a major lifestyle factor in the prevention and treatment of major non-communicable diseases<sup>1</sup>. It is also used to treat back pain<sup>2</sup> sports injuries<sup>3</sup>, osteoporosis<sup>4</sup>, inflammatory bowel disease<sup>5</sup>, neurodegenerative diseases (such as Parkinson's disease)<sup>6</sup>, Huntington's disease<sup>7</sup>, mul-

tiple sclerosis<sup>8</sup>, anxiety disorders<sup>9</sup>, and many other ailments<sup>10–11</sup>. Exercise helps increase confidence, improve socialization, brings happiness, and helps improve sleep<sup>12,13</sup>. The overall quality of life is also improved<sup>14</sup>. A recent US study suggested that moderate to vigorous physical activity could significantly reduce general premature mortality and increase life expectancy<sup>15</sup>.

The World Health Organization recommends that adult men and women should accumulate at least 150 min of moderate-intensity physical exercise per week, while young people aged 5–17 years should accumulate at least 60 min of physical exercise of moderate to vigorous intensity daily<sup>16</sup>.

## 2 | DISCUSSION

Chronic NCDs are common conditions affecting humans<sup>17</sup>. They are gradually replacing infectious diseases as the leading health burden across the world<sup>18</sup>. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of USA defines chronic diseases as “conditions that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both”<sup>19</sup>. They estimate that six in ten adults in the USA have a chronic disease, while four in ten have two or more chronic diseases<sup>19</sup>. In a recent study, Ng et al reported that most individuals develop at least one chronic disease during their lifetime<sup>20</sup>. Rosella et al found that in the Ontario population, two-thirds of individuals had four or more chronic conditions at the time of their death<sup>21</sup>. More and more deaths globally, are now attributable to chronic NCDs<sup>22</sup>. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), chronic NCDs accounted for 71% of the 57 million global deaths in 2016<sup>23</sup>.

Chronic non-communicable diseases include cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) (such as hypertension, coronary artery disease, stroke, and heart failure), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, sleep apnea, and asthma), diabetes mellitus, Alzheimer’s disease, chronic kidney disease (CKD), arthritis, depression, obesity, and liver diseases (such as nonalcoholic

and alcoholic hepatitis, viral hepatitis, cirrhosis of liver)<sup>24</sup>. There is overwhelming evidence that exercise also confers significant benefits in the prevention and management of these diseases<sup>25,26</sup>. As discussed in part I of this two-part manuscript, it has significant benefits for cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, obesity, depression, and liver diseases. This manuscript will discuss its benefits for cancer, diabetes mellitus, kidney diseases, Alzheimer’s disease, and arthritis.

Cancer was diagnosed in 18 million individuals in 2018<sup>27</sup>. Cancers of the lung (2.09 million cases), breast (2.09 million cases), and prostate (1.28 million cases) were the most common in this group<sup>27</sup>. Cancer was responsible for 9.6 million deaths globally in 2018<sup>28</sup>. Today, cancer-related mortality exceeds that caused by communicable diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, tuberculosis, and malaria, combined<sup>29</sup>. Diabetes mellitus (DM) is also a common chronic disease<sup>30</sup>. It is mainly categorized into 2 major subtypes, type I DM (T1D) and type II DM (T2D)<sup>31</sup>. T1D is an autoimmune disorder, with several genetic, epigenetic, and environmental factors playing a role in its genesis<sup>32</sup>. T2D is characterized by insulin resistance and accounts for 90-95% of all diabetes cases<sup>31</sup>. It often leads to the development of several microvascular (retinopathy, nephropathy, and neuropathy) and macrovascular (coronary artery disease, stroke, peripheral artery disease) complications<sup>33</sup>. Deaths from DM continue to increase all over the world<sup>34</sup>. CKD has an estimated prevalence of 10.6%-13.4%<sup>35</sup>, and its prevalence is growing rapidly<sup>36</sup>. CKD progresses to end-stage kidney disease requiring a kidney transplant, and these numbers are also on the increase<sup>37</sup>. It is estimated that the number of people requiring renal replacement will double to 5.4 million by 2030<sup>38</sup>. This population has a mortality rate that is over 100-fold compared to that seen in the normal population<sup>39</sup>. DM continues to be the leading cause of CKD<sup>40</sup>. Dementia affects around 50 million people worldwide and this number is projected to increase to 152 million by 2050<sup>41</sup>. Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is the most common dementia and is caused by amyloid-beta peptide accumulation in the medial temporal lobe and neocortical structures<sup>42</sup>. Treatment for AD is symptomatic as there is no

**Supplementary information** The online version of this article ([10.52845/CMI/2021-2-2-5](https://doi.org/10.52845/CMI/2021-2-2-5)) contains supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.

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cure available at this time<sup>43</sup>. Arthritis is of over 100 types, the most common being rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, psoriatic arthritis, and inflammatory arthritis<sup>44</sup>. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most prevalent chronic joint disease and is associated with cartilage loss<sup>45,46</sup>. It usually affects the knees, although it can affect any joint<sup>45,46</sup>. It is a major cause of disability in older adults<sup>47</sup>. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, systemic, immune-inflammatory disease, especially affecting the synovial joints resulting in synovitis, joint erosion, and cartilage damage<sup>48</sup>. Its etiology includes several genetic, environmental, and endogenous factors<sup>49</sup>.

Lifestyle changes can beneficially modify chronic NCDs<sup>50</sup>. The detrimental but modifiable lifestyle factors include tobacco smoking, inadequate vegetable and fruit consumption, excessive alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and obesity<sup>51</sup>. Part I reviewed the benefits of exercise for cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, obesity, depression, and liver diseases. This manuscript will discuss its benefits for cancer, diabetes mellitus, kidney diseases, Alzheimer's disease, and arthritis.

## 2.1 | CANCER

In 1986, Winningham et al suggested that physical activity may play a major role in oncology<sup>52</sup>. The cancer modulating effect of exercise has been confirmed by several subsequent studies<sup>53-55</sup>. Behrens and the group found that low physical activity accounted for 6% of all cancers in Germany<sup>53</sup>. They reported that physical inactivity resulted in an increase in endometrial cancer by 15%, renal cancer by 17%, liver cancer by 24%, and lung cancer by 19%<sup>53</sup>. According to Islami and the group, physical inactivity accounted for 2.9% of all cancer cases in the US<sup>54</sup>. They estimated that physical inactivity accounted for 26.7% of uterine cancers, 16.3% of colorectal cancers, and 3.9% of female breast cancers<sup>54</sup>. A recent umbrella review, including 19 reviews, 26 meta-analyses, and 541 original studies, evaluating physical activity and cancer risk, concluded that regular physical activity is beneficial in preventing 7 major cancers (colon, breast, endometrium, lung, esophagus, pancreas, and meningioma)<sup>55</sup>. The greatest beneficial impact appears to be on breast and colon

cancer<sup>56</sup>. In a meta-analysis of 38 cohort studies in 2016 by Pizot et al, breast cancer risk was reduced by 12-21% in the most physically active women than in those who were least physically active<sup>57</sup>. In another more recent study, exercising 7 hours a week reduced colon cancer risk by 40%<sup>58</sup>. Several studies have also reported significant reductions in physical activity in cancers of the stomach<sup>59</sup>, kidney<sup>60</sup>, bladder<sup>60</sup>, and endometrium<sup>61</sup>. Minimal amounts of exercise may have protective effects<sup>62</sup>, although there appears to be a dose-dependent relationship<sup>63-65</sup>.

Following a cancer diagnosis, exercise is associated with better clinical outcomes<sup>66-69</sup>. Animal studies have demonstrated a decrease in cancer tumor growth with exercise<sup>67</sup>. Exercise therapy before the initiation of chemotherapy is associated with improvements in tolerance to cancer treatment<sup>68</sup>. Benefits are also noted with exercise pre-surgery<sup>69</sup>. Pre-treatment exercise results in mitigation of the significant functional decline often noted in cancer patients<sup>68,69</sup>.

Exercise during treatment also demonstrates clinical benefits<sup>70-83</sup>. These patients notice an improved tolerance to chemotherapy and surgery<sup>69,70</sup>. Their hospital stay is decreased<sup>69</sup>. They have fewer side effects and less fatigue<sup>71,72</sup>. Their aerobic endurance, strength, flexibility, and body composition improves<sup>73</sup>. They become more physically fit and have increased energy levels and vitality<sup>74</sup>. There is an improvement in sleep quality<sup>75</sup> and a reduction in depression<sup>76</sup> and anxiety<sup>77</sup>, often experienced by these patients. Exercising cancer patients also improve their self-esteem<sup>71</sup>. Their QOL improves<sup>78</sup>. Exercise helps decrease metastasis and cancer recurrence<sup>79,80</sup>. Benefits of exercise have also been seen in individuals after metastasis has occurred<sup>81</sup>. Survival is increased<sup>82,83</sup>. Regular exercise continues to be recommended by various world health organizations for cancer patients<sup>84-88</sup>.

Physical activity induces several cancer-preventive changes in the human body, including reducing adipose tissue, improving insulin resistance, reducing inflammation, enhancing immune function, modulating sex hormones and growth factors, and enhancing resistance to oxidative stress and DNA damage<sup>89</sup>. In patients with established malignant

tumors, physical activity/exercise paradigms regulate intra-tumoral vascular maturity and perfusion, hypoxia, and metabolism and augment the antitumor immune response<sup>90</sup>.

More than 40% of patients diagnosed with cancer have comorbid NCDs, such as diabetes, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and heart failure<sup>91</sup>. Cancer itself may increase the risk of developing some of these diseases<sup>92,93</sup>. Breast cancer survivors experience an increased risk of cardiovascular disease<sup>92</sup> and cardiovascular mortality<sup>93</sup>. Patients with nonmetastatic breast cancer demonstrate a 23% adjusted reduced risk of cardiovascular events, with exercise<sup>94</sup>. Exercise benefits for cancer, therefore, also extend to coexisting NCDs.

## 2.2 | DIABETES MELLITUS

Several studies have stressed the value of regular physical activity as part of lifestyle changes to help prevent or delay type 2 diabetes<sup>95,96</sup>. Church et al found that a weight loss of only 5%-7% achieved with physical activity at least 150–175 min/week and dietary energy restriction demonstrate reductions of 40%–70% in the risk of developing type 2 diabetes in people with impaired glucose tolerance<sup>97</sup>. A systemic review of randomized controlled trials found that lifestyle changes, including exercise, had a preventive effect on the development of T2D in people with impaired glucose tolerance. While the control group had a diabetes incidence of 9.3% to 67.7%, in this study, the lifestyle intervention group demonstrated a reduced incidence of 3% to 46%<sup>98</sup>. A recent systematic review of 53 studies done by Balk et al found that, compared with usual care, diet and physical activity promotion programs improved several cardiometabolic risk factors and reduced the incidence of type 2 diabetes<sup>99</sup>.

Exercise, especially moderate to vigorous, confers several benefits on patients with both type I and type II diabetes<sup>100</sup>. Aerobic exercise in type I diabetes helps by decreasing insulin resistance and improving lipid levels and endothelial function<sup>101</sup>. In T2D, aerobic exercise reduces blood glucose, A1C, triglycerides, blood pressure, and insulin resistance<sup>102</sup>. Both T1D and T2D patients lose weight and become more cardio-metabolically fit

with aerobic exercise. As a result, the cardiovascular risk diminishes<sup>103–105</sup>. The latter is important as diabetics have a higher risk of developing CVDs<sup>106</sup>. CVDs are responsible for most deaths in these patients<sup>107</sup>. Many diabetic patients are obese, and exercise also helps them get more physically fit and function better<sup>108</sup>. Resistance exercises are also helpful in T2D<sup>109,110</sup>. These patients generate more muscle mass, more bone mineral density, and become stronger<sup>109</sup>. There is also improvement in the cardiometabolic profile<sup>109</sup>. Resistance exercises in T1D, if done before aerobic exercises, minimize the risk of exercise-induced hypoglycemia<sup>110</sup>. Flexibility and balance exercises help diabetics improve their joint mobility, which often deteriorates with the combination of hyperglycemia and aging<sup>111</sup>. Stretching exercises increase the range of motion of joints and improve flexibility in these patients<sup>112</sup>. Diabetics may have gait and balance problems, especially if peripheral neuropathy is present<sup>113</sup>. Balance training in these patients can therefore help reduce the risk of falls<sup>114</sup>. Both Yoga and Tai Chi may help improve glycemic control and many QOL parameters<sup>115,116</sup>. Aerobic activity also helps reduce mortality in both types I and type 2 diabetes<sup>117</sup>. Exercise stress testing before starting an exercise program is recommended for previously sedentary diabetics or those with cardiovascular autonomic neuropathy<sup>118</sup>.

## 2.3 | CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE

The role of sedentary behavior and exercise on GFR and albuminuria, or both, has been extensively studied<sup>119–123</sup>. Sedentary behavior increases the risk of developing CKD, while physical exercise reduces this risk<sup>124–126</sup>. In a prospective analysis of the Cardiovascular Health Study, greater baseline physical activity was associated with a lower risk of GFR decline >3 mL/min/1.73 m<sup>2</sup> per year over 7 years of follow-up<sup>127</sup>. In the Second National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey, highly active people, when compared with inactive people, demonstrated a reduced risk for developing kidney failure or dying of CKD over a mean of 13 years<sup>128</sup>. A recent study has also confirmed the preventive benefits of exercise in CKD<sup>129</sup>.

Once CKD has developed, physical activity in the affected individual slows down<sup>130</sup>. This deterioration in physical performance is evidenced by a decreased walking capacity, muscle strength, balance, and fine motor skills<sup>131–134</sup>. With the initiation of dialysis, physical functioning does not improve<sup>135</sup> and continues to deteriorate<sup>136</sup> usually becoming a major disability<sup>137</sup>. The National Kidney Foundation recommends that patients with CKD on dialysis be “counseled and regularly encouraged by nephrology and dialysis staff to increase their level of physical activity”<sup>138</sup>. This is because several studies have demonstrated that physical activity benefits patients with CKD<sup>139</sup>. Exercise in these patients is associated with not only a slower decline in eGFR, but often an improvement<sup>140,141</sup>. In a meta-analysis of 13 RCTs totaling 421 patients with CKD, Zhang et al concluded that exercise therapy was associated with a +2.6 mL/min increase in eGFR<sup>142</sup>. Greenwood et al in a retrospective longitudinal cohort study estimated that each extra hour of sedentary behavior was associated with a worsening of kidney function, while each extra hour of total physical activity was associated with a better kidney function<sup>143</sup>. Exercise training in dialysis patients prevents muscle atrophy and improves functional capacity and quality of life<sup>144,145</sup>. Benefits of exercise have also been noted in renal transplant patients<sup>146</sup>.

Besides the benefits for the kidneys, exercise in CKD patients improves aerobic and functional capacity<sup>147,148</sup>. It improves peak/maximum oxygen consumption, strength, fine motor skills, and balance<sup>149,150</sup>. There is a reduction in cardiovascular outcomes<sup>151</sup>. Several benefits have also been noted with exercise following renal transplantation<sup>152</sup>. Overall, exercise in CKD patients imparts a better prognosis, a better quality of life, and better survival<sup>153–155</sup>. Exercise (aerobic, resistance, and flexibility) has been recommended for CKD patients by major kidney organizations<sup>156–158</sup>. Exercise is usually feasible, and well-tolerated in CKD patients, including those on dialysis and those following renal transplantation<sup>159–161</sup>.

Physical activity may be associated with GFR and albuminuria via mechanisms such as modulation of inflammation, endothelial function, the renin-angiotensin system, and renal sympathetic nerve

activity<sup>162–164</sup>. The beneficial change in GFR and albuminuria may also be mediated by modification of risk factors such as T2DM blood pressure, adiposity, and dyslipidemia, by increased physical activity<sup>165–168</sup>.

## 2.4 | ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Exercise and brain health are intricately associated<sup>169</sup>. Several cross-sectional, longitudinal observational studies and narrative reviews have discussed the benefits of exercise on cognitive function<sup>170–172</sup>. Meta-analytic reviews have concluded that older adults are protected against cognitive decline if they engage in exercise<sup>173–175</sup>. Northey and his group noted after analyzing 36 studies that physical exercise, in people over the age of 50, improved cognitive function, irrespective of their baseline cognitive status<sup>173</sup>. Falck et al conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 48 studies involving adults aged 60 or older and noted that exercise was associated with an improvement in cognitive function<sup>174</sup>. Chen et al recently performed a meta-analysis of 33 RCT studies and concluded that exercise interventions improve executive function<sup>175</sup>. Executive functions mainly originate in the prefrontal cortex and include attentional control, working memory, inhibition, and problem-solving. They are all important aspects of cognition.

Hamer and Chida in a systematic review involving 163,000 non-psychotic participants found that the risk of dementia and AD was lowered by 28% and 45% with physical activity<sup>176</sup>. Lautenschlager et al found that in older adults with mild cognitive impairment, 142 minutes of extra exercise per week improved cognition<sup>177</sup>. Two more recent meta-analyses have also confirmed the slowing effects of aerobic exercise on cognitive decline, in patients with MCI or even AD<sup>178,179</sup>. Zheng et al evaluated 11 studies involving 1497 participants and found that in patients with MCI, aerobic exercise improved global cognitive ability and memory<sup>178</sup>. Panza and colleagues in a meta-analysis of nineteen studies, which included 1,145 subjects, reported that exercise training may delay the decline in cognitive function that occurs in individuals who are at risk of or have devel-

oped AD<sup>179</sup>. In patients with AD, exercise results in an improvement in cognitive function<sup>180</sup>, decreased neuropsychiatric symptoms, and a slower decline in activities of daily living<sup>181</sup>. And, consequently, reduced caregiver burden<sup>182</sup>. Patients with AD experience fewer side effects<sup>183</sup> and better adherence to medications<sup>184</sup>, with exercise.

The mechanisms behind the exercise-related improvement in brain health have been well studied<sup>185,186</sup>. Exercise preserves neurogenesis<sup>187,188</sup> and helps beneficial neuroplasticity<sup>189</sup>. Exercise also helps improve diabetes, hypertension, obesity, stress, depression, and inflammation, which are also risk factors for dementia<sup>190</sup>. In conclusion, physical activity is inversely associated with the risk of developing and the progression of dementia.

## 2.5 | ARTHRITIS

The beneficial role of exercise in osteoarthritis is also persuasive<sup>191–195</sup>. Improved pain and functional outcomes after exercise therapy in OA are well demonstrated by numerous meta-analytic studies<sup>191,192</sup>. Goh et al showed that exercise not only significantly reduced pain and improved function in patients with OA, but improved performance and QOL in these patients as compared with usual care at 8 weeks<sup>193</sup>. Both traditional exercises such as aerobic, resistance, and flexibility, and non-traditional exercises such as Tai Chi, Yoga, and aquatics are effective in the management of knee and hip osteoarthritis<sup>194</sup>. In their systematic review of 44 clinical trials involving patients with knee osteoarthritis, there was an improvement in physical function and the quality of life, and these effects lasted up to six months after cessation of land-based therapeutic exercises<sup>195</sup>. Severe hip osteoarthritis is one of the main causes of disabling pain, functional impairment, and reduced quality of life in elderly patients<sup>196</sup>. In a review of 10 RCTs, researchers concluded that land-based therapeutic exercises can reduce pain and improve physical function among people with symptomatic hip OA<sup>197</sup>. Land- and aquatic-based physical activities help patients with both knee and hip OA to reduce pain and increase mobility, muscle strength, joint flexibility, and aerobic endurance<sup>198</sup>. Initially, aquatic exercises may be deployed. The buoyancy

of the water decreases joint loading, which can help decrease pain, and warm water may also have a therapeutic effect<sup>199</sup>. Once patients become more mobile, they can transition to land-based exercises. Exercise should be the main intervention for OA patients<sup>193,200</sup>. Weesandt and his group in a review concluded that osteoarthritis can be successfully managed and treated through exercise, with minimal risk of negative consequences<sup>201</sup>.

Rheumatoid arthritis also responds well to physical exercise<sup>202–208</sup>. These patients notice an improvement in joint health and mobility. They increase their aerobic work capacity and become more physically active. They notice an improvement in endurance, strength, and dynamic balance. Rheumatoid fatigue and cachexia are reduced. There is also an improvement in psychological well-being. Increased physical activity and exercise also help reduce the impact of systemic manifestations of RA<sup>209</sup>, such as increased inflammation, disturbed vascular function, and increased cardiovascular risk in these patients<sup>210–212</sup>. Despite these benefits, RA patients have lower physical activity levels than healthy individuals<sup>213–215</sup>, with 71 % of RA patients not participating in regular physical activity<sup>216</sup>.

Exercise is relatively safe as compared with pharmacological treatments in the management of arthritis<sup>217</sup>. The American College of Rheumatology/Arthritis Foundation guidelines for the management of arthritis of the hip and knee emphasize the importance of regularly performed physical exercise as an important therapeutic intervention<sup>218</sup>.

## 3 | CONCLUSION

Exercise plays a major preventive and therapeutic role in most non-communicable diseases. It imparts positive physical and psychological health outcomes. It is safe and feasible for most NCD patients. It can help maintain or increase physical independence over time and decrease caregiver burden. Most professional associations of NCDs emphasize the incorporation of exercise for the prevention and management of these diseases.

**Acknowledgment:** None

**Funding:** None

**Conflict of interest:** None

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**How to cite this article:** Agarwal S.K., MD, **Exer-cise and Non-Communicable Diseases: Part II Cancer, Diabetes Mellitus, Kidney Diseases, Alzheimer’s Disease, Arthritis.** *Clinical Medicine Insights.* 2021;124–143. <https://doi.org/10.52845/CMI/2021-2-2-5>