

Rehabilitation

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[1\]](#), January / 2012

Cancer rehabilitation helps a person with cancer obtain the best physical, social, psychological, and work-related functioning during and after cancer treatment. The goal of rehabilitation is to help a person regain control over many aspects of their lives and remain as independent and productive as possible. Rehabilitation can be valuable to anyone with cancer and those recovering from cancer treatment.

How cancer rehabilitation can help

Rehabilitation can improve the quality of life for people with cancer and their families, including:

- Improving physical strength to help offset any limitations from cancer and cancer treatment
- Helping the person with cancer become more independent and less reliant on caregivers
- Helping the person with cancer adjust to actual, perceived, and potential losses due to cancer and cancer treatment
- Reducing sleep problems
- Lowering the number of hospitalizations

Cancer rehabilitation services

Many cancer centers and hospitals offer a variety of cancer rehabilitation services to their patients, or are willing to help them identify local resources to assist with rehabilitation. Patients and family members are encouraged to be active, informed partners in the rehabilitation process and seek out the services they need. Talk with a nurse or social worker about the services you are interested in:

- Patient and family education and counseling
- Pain management techniques and medications
- Nutritional counseling
- Exercise programs to help to build strength, endurance, and mobility
- Smoking cessation education and support programs
- Assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) such as eating, drinking, dressing, bathing, using the toilet, cooking, and basic housekeeping

The cancer rehabilitation team

Comprehensive cancer rehabilitation is provided by a team of health care professionals who work closely together. The team helps a person adapt to his or her situation, whether the changes are temporary or permanent. These professionals may include any of the following:

Oncologist. This is a medical doctor who specializes in the care and treatment of people with cancer. He or she may be responsible for coordinating the cancer rehabilitation team.

Physiatrist (also called a rehabilitation specialist). This person is a medical doctor who treats injuries and illnesses that affect how you move, including the treatment of pain. [Find a physiatrist in your area \[2\]](#).

Rehabilitation nurse. A rehabilitation nurse specializes in assisting people with a chronic illness, disability, or injury to restore physical functioning and adjust to a changed environment or lifestyle. A rehabilitation nurse helps people with cancer increase independence, reduce potential complications after cancer treatment, provide patient and family education and counseling, and assist in case management.

Physical therapist. A physical therapist works with patients to help restore mobility and physical functioning, while preventing further disability. This service may be particularly important for people who have lost muscle tone because of prolonged bed rest, have trouble with balance, or need to use canes or other assistive devices after cancer treatment.

Occupational therapist. An occupational therapist helps people prevent and live with illness, injury, and disability. For example, an occupational therapist may help someone avoid lymphedema after breast cancer surgery. In addition, occupational therapists are trained to evaluate the layout of the home, school, or workplace to increase patients' mobility and assist with activities of daily living.

Recreational therapist. A recreational therapist helps a person with cancer reduce stress, anxiety, and depression by using games, exercise, arts, crafts, and music to build confidence and strengthen personal skills.

Dietitian. A dietitian is a food and nutrition professional who answers questions about nutrition and helps people with cancer plan menus to cope with special needs. Dietitians may provide nutritional counseling; develop meal plans; and monitor the body weight, caloric, and dietary needs of a

person with cancer.

Psychologist/psychiatrist. These and other mental health professionals work to address the emotional, psychological, and behavioral needs of the person with cancer and his or her family. These may be longstanding or have resulted from the illness and consequences of treatments. These mental health professionals can help patients process their experience and find ways of coping with changes in their lives.

Social worker. A social worker may counsel patients and families in discharge planning (transferring care from the hospital to home) and home care, help with coping skills and lifestyle adjustments, and facilitate support groups. Social workers are also trained to help people living with cancer cope with financial concerns and provide links to community resources. Learn [how a social worker can help](#) [3].

Home-health aide. This person provides personal care services by helping people with ADLs, such as bathing, dressing, using the toilet, and moving around. Some home health aides are specially trained to provide more complex services, under the supervision of a nurse. Find out more about [home health care](#) [4].

Vocational counselor. A vocational counselor specializes in helping people recovering from cancer find and keep a satisfying job. This is important for those who may no longer be able to return to their previous position because of physical or emotional limitations.

Clergy member/chaplain. This professional is a trained member of the clergy who offers spiritual support and rituals for patients and their families, facilitates support groups, and offers support in health crisis situations. Most hospitals have clergy on staff who work with people of all faiths. Some people may prefer to work with their own clergy person.

Case manager. A case manager helps to design and monitor the cancer rehabilitation program. Case managers often act as the liaison between the person with cancer, the cancer rehabilitation team, and the insurance provider.

Speech-language pathologist. This professional specializes in communication disorders. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) helps patients regain their speaking, swallowing, and oral motor skills after cancer treatment that affects the head, mouth, and neck.

More Information

[Coping: Emotional and Physical Matters](#) [5]

[Caregiving](#) [6]

[Survivorship](#) [7]

Additional resources

LIVESTRONG: [Physical Rehabilitation](#) [8]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[2] <http://www.aapmr.org/patients/findphysician/Pages/default.aspx>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24556>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25030>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25109>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25009>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22>

[8] <http://www.livestrong.org/Get-Help/Learn-About-Cancer/Cancer-Support-Topics/Physical-Effects-of-Cancer/Physical-Rehabilitation>