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Rehabilitation [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 02/2015

Key Messages:

- Rehabilitation often helps patients regain strength, physical functioning, and independence that they may have lost due to cancer or its treatment.
- Talk with your health care team to learn about the rehabilitation services available at your cancer center or in your area.
- Depending on your needs, you may visit one or more specialists trained in specific areas of rehabilitation.

After cancer treatment, patients may notice a difference in their physical, social, psychological, and work-related abilities. Cancer rehabilitation helps a person with cancer regain and improve the abilities that may have changed after cancer treatment. The goal of rehabilitation is to help a person remain as independent and productive as possible.

How cancer rehabilitation can help

Rehabilitation can improve the quality of life for people with cancer by reaching the following goals:

- Improving physical strength to help offset limitations caused by cancer and cancer treatment
- Increasing a person?s ability to care for himself or herself and reducing support needed from caregivers
- Providing support to adjust to actual, perceived, and potential losses due to cancer and cancer treatment
- Managing symptoms of cancer and its treatment, including fatigue, sleep problems, and pain.
- Reducing how often a person needs to stay at the hospital

Cancer rehabilitation services

Many cancer centers and hospitals offer rehabilitation services to their patients. Or, your health care team can help you find local rehabilitation services. Patients and family members should remain active and informed partners in the rehabilitation process and seek the services they

need. Talk with a nurse or social worker about which of the services listed below interest you:

- Patient and family education and counseling
- Treatment of pain
- Nutritional advice
- Exercise programs to build strength and improve how you move. Exercise may also help with sleep, anxiety, and possibly lengthen the lives of people with some types of cancers.
- Support to quit smoking
- Help with activities of daily living, such as eating, drinking, dressing, bathing, using the toilet, cooking, and basic chores

The cancer rehabilitation team

A team of health care professionals works closely to provide cancer rehabilitation. The team members help 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 doctor treats cancer, and may be responsible for leading the cancer rehabilitation team.

Physiatrist, also called a rehabilitation specialist. This doctor treats injuries and illnesses that affect how people move, including treating pain.

Rehabilitation nurse. A rehabilitation nurse helps people with a long-term illness, disability, or injury regain physical abilities. They can also help improve a person?s ability to care for himself or herself and adjust to a changed lifestyle. A rehabilitation nurse can also provide education and counseling to patients and families.

Physical therapist. This health care professional helps patients improve their physical strength and ability to move. This is especially important for people who notice physical changes after cancer treatment that affect how they move. People experiencing the following challenges can benefit from physical therapy.

- Muscle loss from long-term bed rest
- Difficulty balancing
- Needing a cane or other assistive device

Physical therapists may also help with some types of pain with treatments such as ultrasound.

Occupational therapist. This professional helps patients perform the activities important to them with methods and tools to increase function, comfort, and safety. Occupational therapists design a tailored therapy plan based on the layout of a person?s home, school, or work place. They can also help manage fatigue by teaching methods to help reduce the effort needed to do certain tasks.

Lymphedema therapist. Lymphedema is a buildup of fluid from damage to lymph nodes during cancer treatment. A certified lymphedema therapist can help manage this condition with compression garments, specialized massage and bandaging methods, and exercises.

Recreational therapist. This professional uses games, exercise, arts, crafts, and music to help a person with cancer reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. These activities can also help people build confidence and strengthen personal skills.

Dietitian. This food and nutrition professional helps people with cancer understand their special needs. A dietitian can recommend diets or meal plans. Dietitians may also monitor the body weight and dietary needs of a person with cancer.

Psychologist/psychiatrist. These and other mental health professionals address the emotional, psychological, and behavioral needs of the person with cancer and those of his or her family. Such needs may be longstanding or may have resulted from the challenges of cancer and its treatment. These mental health professionals can help patients cope with their experience and the changes in their lives.

Social worker. This professional provides a variety of services, which may include:

- Counseling patients and families in moving care from the hospital to home and providing home care
- Helping with coping skills and lifestyle changes
- Leading support groups.
- Help in coping with financial concerns
- Linking patients and families to community resources

Learn how a social worker can help [3].

Home-health aide. This person helps with daily activities, such as bathing, dressing, using the toilet, and moving around the home. Some home health aides receive training to provide more complex services under the supervision of a nurse. Find out more about home health care [4].

Vocational counselor. This professional helps people recovering from cancer find and keep a satisfying job. This is an important service for those who may no longer be able to return to their previous position because of physical or emotional changes.

Clergy member or chaplain. This professional offers spiritual support and rituals for patients and their families, leads support groups, and offers support in health crisis situations. Most hospitals have clergy who work with people of all faiths. However, some people choose to work with their own clergy member.

Case manager. This professional helps design and monitor the cancer rehabilitation program. Case managers often act as the link between the person with cancer, the cancer rehabilitation team, and the insurance provider.

Speech-language pathologist (SLP). This professional specializes in communication and swallowing disorders. An SLP helps patients regain their speaking, swallowing, and oral motor

skills after cancer treatment that affects the head, mouth, and neck.

More Information

Follow-up Care After Cancer Treatment [5]

Caregiver Support [6]

Survivorship [7]

Additional Resource

LIVE**STRONG**: Rehabilitation After Cancer [8]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/follow-care-after-cancer-treatment/rehabilitation
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/30961
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25030
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/30671
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/25009
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/22
[8] http://www.livestrong.org/we-can-help/healthy-living-after-treatment/rehabilitation-after-cancer/