

Frequently Asked Questions



What is the purpose of cancer rehab?

A cancer diagnosis changes your life, often in ways you wouldn't expect. As much as you try, the diagnosis, the treatment and the disease can take over your life. From diagnosis right throughout treatment and recovery, Certified Cancer Rehab Clinicians are available to help.

They can assist you to take back some control through expert knowledge, personal care and genuine compassion. This support will help you understand what you can do to take the edge off the discomfort; to make the treatment more bearable, reduce side effects, and build back your strength and stamina for the important things in your life. Cancer Rehab Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists will teach you how to make optimal use of the available support and resources on offer.

What should I expect on my first session?

During your first appointment a Cancer Rehab Physiotherapist will take time to:

- answer questions about your treatment, symptoms, and rehab options
- listen to your concerns and understand what you would like to get out of your rehab sessions
- do a physical and functional assessment to assess the impact of cancer treatment on your body
- co-develop a personalised rehab care plan

Will the Cancer Rehab Physiotherapist understand my health needs and the treatment I am on?

Yes – your Cancer Rehab Physiotherapist will liaise with your medical team to ensure the rehab they provide is appropriate for your health needs.

When is the best time to start rehab after a cancer diagnosis?

The earlier the better. Here's why:

Before a new treatment commences:

- risks can be identified early, and steps can be put in place to increase your resilience to treatment and reduce the risk of complications.
- it helps prevent unnecessary disability

During treatment:

- helps you stay as active as possible and participate in work, family, and other life roles
- lessens the side effects and symptoms of the cancer treatment
- helps keep you as independent as possible
- improves your quality of life

After treatment:

- helps you restore energy, strength, stamina, balance, and confidence
- assists you to return to daily activities, sport and work
- reduces pain, stiffness and mobility issues
- helps prevent long-term health problems

What qualifications does a Cancer Rehab Physiotherapist /OT have?

A certified Cancer Rehab Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist has additional post-graduate training in oncology rehabilitation. They understand the impact of all types of cancer treatment and medications. They offer evidence based best practice rehabilitation techniques for any type and stage of cancer.

I have no energy – should I start my cancer rehab sessions when my treatment is completed?

Lack of energy is a very common side effect of cancer treatment and one that can be effectively managed and improved with appropriate rehab support. Evidence shows that if you do nothing and rest – your fatigue symptoms will likely get worse. The less you do the less you are capable of doing.

Getting support for fatigue management will help you build up your energy levels to allow you to get back to normalcy quicker. A cancer rehab clinician will tailor his support for your particular needs and resources on offer.

What problems can cancer rehabilitation address?

Physical problems

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause many different kinds of physical problems. Cancer rehabilitation can help with many of them, including:

- pain
- swelling
- weakness and loss of strength
- range of motion and flexibility issues
- decreased endurance
- skin changes from radiation therapy
- lymphedema
- balance issues and fear of falling
- neuropathy, or numbness and tingling in hands or feet
- fatigue
- sexual dysfunction
- problems swallowing
- problems chewing food

Mobility problems

Mobility problems affect how a person moves around. Cancer rehabilitation can help if you have difficulty:

- getting up off the floor
- getting out of a chair
- climbing stairs
- walking
- getting dressed
- showering

Cognitive problems

Cognitive problems are related to a person's mental abilities.

- difficulty multitasking
- difficulty thinking clearly or mental foginess
- memory trouble

I have a pre-existing medical condition, is cancer rehab safe for me?

Yes. During your first appointment with a certified cancer rehab clinician your previous medical history will be included in the assessment and incorporated into your rehab care plan. A referral to an appropriate medical professional will be included if necessary.

Who are in my healthcare team?

MEDICAL TEAM

Family Doctor

Family doctors (also called general practitioners or GPs) recognise, advise, treat or refer you for a range of health conditions and are aware of cancer treatments and any other health conditions that contribute to your cancer recovery.

Medical Oncologist

A medical oncologist is a doctor who specialises in caring for patients with cancer using chemotherapy, hormonal therapy, biological therapy and targeted therapy. They prescribe medications to treat cancer and manage side effects.

Radiation Oncologist

Radiation oncologists specialise in radiation to treat cancer, to control the growth of cancer or to relieve symptoms such as pain. Radiation oncologists work closely with medical oncologists, surgeons, and other doctors to plan your treatment and manage any side effects that may occur due to radiation therapy.

Surgical Oncologist

Cancer surgeons are doctors who diagnose, biopsy and surgically treat all types of cancers. They are specialised to remove cancerous lesions, tumours and organs and obtain tissue samples to make a diagnosis.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a doctor who assesses, diagnoses, and treats mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. They prescribe medications and assess and treat psychological reactions that may be caused by medical problems, such as cancer and its treatment.

Nurse

Registered nurses work with cancer patients to answer questions, monitor for symptoms, and side effects, and to provide support to patients and their families. Registered nurses may be specially trained to provide chemotherapy treatments and to support those people undergoing radiotherapy.

Nurse Practitioner

A nurse practitioner (NP) is a registered nurse with additional training and education in physical assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. Nurse practitioners specialising in oncology through their clinical experience and training have extended knowledge about cancer treatment and side effects.

Pain and Symptom Management/ Palliative Care Doctors

Pain and symptom management/palliative care doctors focus on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, physical stress, and mental stress of a cancer, and to increase quality of life. They can offer symptom management to help you stay active for as long as possible during treatment.

Ophthalmologist

An ophthalmologist is a physician with specialised training in the anatomy and function of the eye and vision disorders. They can recommend vision aids (glasses), provide an assessment of the limits of vision and be helpful in coordinating referrals to vision services to improve functioning.

Otolaryngologist

An otolaryngologist is a physician specialised in the medical and surgical treatment of disorders of the ear, nose and throat, as well as related structures of the head and neck. With cancer diagnosis specifically affecting these regions, such as head and neck cancers, otolaryngologists can be helpful to discuss adaptive aids for hearing or speech.

Pharmacist

A pharmacist can provide guidance on the safe and effective use of medications. Pharmacists offer advice about drug selection, monitoring for side effects, avoiding drug interactions and assessing outcomes of therapy.

Who are in my healthcare team?

REHABILITATION TEAM

Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapists or OTs provide therapy and support to people with limited ability to carry out everyday activities because of illness, injury, or disability. They assess and provide adaptive strategies for activities of daily living to support independent functioning and participation as much as what is possible.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor

They assess work skills and abilities, provide career counselling, and recommend suitable kinds of work. Vocational rehabilitation counsellors negotiate accommodations with employers and teach people how to search for new jobs if they want to make a change.

Psychologist

A psychologist is trained to understand the impact of normal and abnormal brain functioning on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural functions. A clinical or health psychologist may provide psychological support to a person who is struggling with a cancer diagnosis and can provide counselling to address psychological issues that could affect functioning in everyday life and work.

Neuropsychologist

Neuropsychologists focus on how injuries or illness of the brain affect cognitive function, such as information processing, attention, and memory. They can provide assessments, education, and rehabilitation to compensate for cognitive difficulties to help maintain or enhance functioning.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists, or Physios, assess people's ability to move and maximize their quality of life through prevention and rehabilitation. Physiotherapists can help you reduce your pain and stiffness, increase your endurance, strength, and balance, and regain functional ability.

Social Worker/Clinical Counsellor

Social workers/counsellors can help with social, emotional, relationship and practical issues related to self-image, depression, family, work, finances, insurance, disability, distress and anxiety, and identify appropriate supports that can help.

Speech-language Pathologist

Speech-language pathologists (also called SLPs or speech therapists) assess and manage communication and swallowing disorders. They help people communicate better by improving their pronunciation, word-finding, understanding, reading, and writing, reasoning, problem-solving, memory and organizational skills.

SLPs also help people with swallowing challenges by providing therapy or teaching strategies to allow them to eat safely without risk of choking or developing pneumonia.

Lymphedema Therapist

There is a wide range of healthcare specialists that specialise in the treatment of lymphedema after cancer such as physical medicine doctors, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists and massage therapists. A lymphedema therapist can recommend wearing a compression sleeve or garment as a precaution.

They can also help rehabilitate lymphedema symptoms and may provide guidance on lifting capacity, range of motion and specific movements to avoid further pain, negative symptoms, and injury.

Exercise Physiologist

An exercise physiologist helps people participate in exercise programs to improve their cardiovascular health, flexibility, or body composition. They develop customized fitness plans that helps physical strength and conditioning.

Who are in my healthcare team?

WORKPLACE TEAM

Human Resources Professional

Human resources advisers or managers are responsible for performance management and pay, wellbeing, training and development, employment relations and policies for the staff of an organisation. Your employer may have an HR manager or advisor who can assist in your return to work and to ensure your workplace is aware of your needs in the workplace and supportive.

Occupational Health Nurse/Advisor

Occupational health advisors are often nurses and work for your employer on staff or as consultants. They specialise in workplace health and can help you understand your legal rights. They can also help you decide if you are ready to return to work after treatment and recommend accommodations that will allow you to stay at work.

Union Representative

A union representative can provide valuable advice on your plans to return to work, and on work accommodations. Duties of union officials include working with the employer to find reasonable work accommodation solutions for employees returning to work.

Employee Assistance Counsellor

An employee assistance counsellor is a clinical counsellor, social worker or psychologist who can listen to your concerns about the workplace and your wellbeing. They can help you cope with stress, address interpersonal issues and, in some cases, explore career changes. Employment assistance counselling is typically funded through workplace extended healthcare plans.

Health and Disability Advocate

An advocate can tell you what your rights are, answer your questions and clarify what the issues are, discuss your options for making a complaint and support you through the complaints process if you have concerns about your health care or a health care provider.

INSURANCE TEAM

Case Manager

A case manager is involved with the other insurance team members to monitor and make decisions regarding your claim. They gather information to assess your ability to work, track your progress, determine and refer to other professionals to aid in vocational rehabilitation and help to calculate insurance payments for a graduated return to work.

Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant

The vocational rehabilitation consultant specialises in vocational rehabilitation (see vocational rehabilitation counsellor) and can provide professional assessment, make recommendations to determine employability and rehabilitation services, and consult with your employer to aid in return to work. They can be helpful in working with you to identify and overcome the barriers to work and developing a vocational rehabilitation plan to help you return to work.

Insurance Adviser

The insurance adviser is often the person who sold the insurance policy (typically short and long-term disability or critical incident insurance) to your employer or union. They are often very familiar with the terms of the insurance contract and can be helpful in interpreting, navigating, or advocating if the insurance company is not meeting the terms of the contract.

Boost

Cancer Rehab Programme

