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What Is Cancer Rehab?

Cancer rehab (or rehabilitation) is a supportive health care program. It can help with physical, mobility, and thinking and memory problems caused by cancer and its

- Am I having more trouble getting around?
- Am I having pain, weakness, or other symptoms?
- Am I having trouble thinking clearly?

It is important to ask about the changes you notice as soon as possible, so they can be corrected before they get worse. For example, a little bit of joint stiffness in your arm might cause you to use your arm less. Over time, your arm might become weaker and stiffer.

What is prehab?

You can also ask your cancer care team about seeing a cancer rehab professional before cancer treatment begins. The rehab professional can measure your strength, mobility, and activities before problems start. They might suggest things you can do to help you prepare physically and mentally for cancer treatment, called **prehab**.

You can then be monitored throughout treatment and beyond to catch issues before

have trouble:

- Getting up off the floor

Physical therapist (PT): A therapist who helps examine, test, and treat physical problems. The PT uses exercises, heat, cold, and other methods to restore or maintain the body's strength, mobility, and function.

Physiatrist: Physiatrists are also called **physical medicine** and **rehab specialists**. They specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of nerve, muscle, and bone disorders that can change how people move and function. These specialists often work with people on [pain management](#)¹⁴.

Psychologist: This specialist assesses a person's mental and emotional status and provides testing and counseling services to those who may have an emotional or mental health problem. Also called **Cognitive psychologists** or **neuropsychologists**.

Speech therapist: A health professional who is specially trained to work with people who have speech and swallowing problems. Speech therapists help people learn skills to communicate and also make sure that patients can safely eat and drink if they have [swallowing disorders](#)¹⁵. Also called a **speech pathologist**.

Lymphedema therapist: These therapists evaluate and treat [lymphedema](#)¹⁶ (build-up of fluid in the tissues) by focusing on reducing swelling and controlling pain. They often use specialized massages, bandaging methods, compression garments, and exercises.

Vocational counselor: Vocational counselors support people who are returning to work [during](#)¹⁷ or [after cancer treatment](#)¹⁸. They can help a person learn how to do daily job-related tasks more easily.

Recreational therapist: Recreational therapists help maintain a person's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing by helping to reduce [stress](#)¹⁹, [anxiety](#)²⁰, and [depression](#)²¹. They also help build a person's confidence and strengthen personal skills. Recreational therapy provides treatment services in many different ways, including through art, exercise, games, dance, and music.

Exercise physiologist: Exercise physiologists analyze a person's fitness to help them improve function. Using stress tests and other tools, they evaluate heart function and metabolism. They can also design fitness plans that meet the needs of people during and after cancer treatment. Learn more about [exercise during and after cancer treatment](#)²².

Questions to ask the health care team

Consider asking your health care team about cancer rehab:

- Are there ways I can prepare myself physically and mentally for cancer treatment?
- How likely am I to need physical therapy, speech therapy, nutrition guidance, or another type of rehab during or after my cancer treatment?
- What type of cancer rehab would you suggest for me?
- How can this rehab help me?
- Can you suggest a cancer rehab specialist who can help me with the side effect I am experiencing?
- What can I do at home to stay as safe and independent as possible?

Hyperlinks

- [treatment.html](#)
18. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/returning-to-work-after-cancer-treatment.html
 19. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/distress.html
 20. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html
 21. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/depression.html
 22. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html

References

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Vargo MM. Outcome measures and patient-reported metrics in cancer rehab. *Curr Oncol Rep*. 2023 Aug;25(8):869-82.

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Written by

American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team
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