

# Cancer Recovery with Physiotherapy

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**C**ancer touches all of us. Someone you know – a grandparent, a parent, a neighbour, a friend, or maybe even you have been effected. What's more, it's estimated that one in every two Canadians are expected to develop cancer during their lifetime. The good news is the Canadian Cancer Society reports over 60 percent of Canadians diagnosed with the disease are expected to survive five years or more.

Unfortunately, the effects of cancer and cancer treatments can result in significant physical issues which include decreased function, independence and quality of life. Some of these physical challenges are muscle weakness, joint stiffness, fatigue, scar tightness, limited mobility, pain, balance impairments, swelling or lymphedema, as well as numbness and tingling.

In addition, many people experience mental health distress such as anxiety, depression and brain fog. Knowing there is a strong connection between our physical and mental well-being, if we work to achieve improvements physically, we also benefit mentally.

Rehabilitation after cancer and cancer treatments can help with recuperation and this is where physiotherapists can play an integral role. Physiotherapists are uniquely qualified to advise, consult, assess and treat the broad range of cancer-related problems that limit function and mobility for optimal recovery.

One area of focus is physical activity and fitness. Many people diagnosed with cancer know they need to get back to exercising, but simply don't know what they should be doing, what is safe to do or how to start an exercise program. Our goal as physiotherapists is to help people return to their

activities of daily living, recreation and work by guiding this process and providing individualized exercises to regain confidence, strength and stamina.

Because every individual diagnosed with cancer is a physiotherapy rehabilitation candidate, we can help the entire way throughout a cancer patient's journey.

So when is the best time to begin?

Actually, the time of diagnosis, before treatment begins is ideal to assess baseline mobility and function, to provide education and support, and to get people started on an exercise program. Physiotherapists can then meet with patients during and after treatments of chemotherapy and radiation, or surgery, to re-examine their mobility and function. This may also include additional advice and exercises, and to help reduce or manage the side effects of treatment.

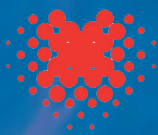
As well, physiotherapists can provide interventions as needed. Ongoing monitoring of patients for re-assessments, progression of exercise and advice will help to incorporate healthy lifestyle habits for long-term wellness.

Whether you or someone you know has been touched by cancer, physiotherapy is there to support the recovery. It has definitely touched my life. I'm now a 10-year breast cancer survivor who has been passionately working in the area of cancer rehabilitation since my diagnosis.

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*Karen Dobbin is a Certified Lymphedema Therapist/physiotherapist at Cancer Rehabilitation*

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