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## What to Expect from Cancer Rehab

Cancer rehab (rehabilitation) can help you regain control over many parts of your life during and after cancer treatment. The goal is to improve your ability to move and function and to keep you as active and independent as possible.

When you start cancer rehab, you will work with professionals trained in the specific areas of rehab that you need. The professional will work with the rest of your cancer care team to make a rehab plan for you.

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### Who provides cancer rehab services?

There are many [types of professionals](#)<sup>1</sup> who provide cancer rehab services, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech pathologists. Each type of specialist has specific education and training requirements.

Many cancer centers and hospitals offer cancer rehab services. These services are most often given on an outpatient basis so you don't have to stay overnight at a hospital or cancer center. People with advanced cancer or complex challenges may get inpatient rehab at the hospital, a rehab center, or a long-term care center. This means they stay overnight or longer. Some rehab services can also be given in a person's home.

## How to choose a cancer rehab program

Think about these factors when choosing a cancer rehab program:

### What type of problems you need help with

The rehab services you need will depend on whether you have physical, mobility, or thinking and memory problems. Ask your primary or cancer care team which type or types of [rehab specialist](#)<sup>2</sup> could help with your problems. You can then look for a program that offers all the services you need.

### The location of the program

If your doctor suggests outpatient cancer rehab, ask about local options. Finding services close to your home or office can make it easier to get to your appointments. Depending on your rehab plan, you may have one or more rehab appointments a week for several weeks or months.

### Your insurance coverage

Health insurance may affect your decision on where to receive cancer rehab. You might only be able to choose rehab programs covered by your insurance. Your insurance company can give you a list of approved programs. Ask how many rehab sessions your insurance covers each year and what you'll have to pay out of pocket for each appointment.

## How to prepare for your first cancer rehab appointment

When you make your first appointment, ask the clinic:

- What should I bring with me to my first appointment?
- What type of rehab specialist will I see during my first visit?
- Is the rehab specialist I'm seeing trained and experienced in working with people with cancer or cancer survivors?
- What should I expect during this appointment?
- What type of clothing should I wear?
- Will I be doing any physical activity during my visit?
- Will any tests be done?
- How long will my appointment last?

- Will my insurance cover this visit? Will I need to pay anything out of pocket?

The clinic will likely ask you to fill out detailed forms before the first appointment, either at home or in the clinic. These forms will ask about your cancer treatment and medical history. They may also ask you to tell them about the limits you have and the problems you are having from the cancer or its treatment. In addition to filling out the forms, you may want to:

- Write down the goals you hope to achieve through cancer rehab so you can share them during your appointment.
- Write down a list of questions you would like to ask about cancer rehab.
- Ask a loved one to go with you so they can help you listen and take notes.

## What to expect during your pre-treatment assessment

Your first cancer rehab appointment will be a full evaluation of your medical history and current problems. This is called a **pre-treatment assessment**.

You will be asked several questions, such as:

- What limits you from doing things? How are these limits affecting your life?
- Are you in pain? If so, what makes it better or worse?
- What problems are you having in your home environment? Your work environment?
- Are you having trouble with daily activities, such as bathing, getting dressed, or eating?
- What hobbies do you have and are you able to take part in them?
- Do you feel tired or weak?
- Are you having difficulty multitasking, thinking clearly, or remembering things?
- What do you hope to achieve through cancer rehab?

The rehab specialist will most likely do physical examinations and evaluations. Depending on the type of rehab you are receiving, they may test your range of motion, muscle strength, or nerve function. They will also check your body for swelling or inflammation. During this appointment, you might also be asked to complete everyday activities, such as walking or standing up from a chair, so they can evaluate your range of motion.

By answering these questions and completing these examinations, you can help your rehab specialist recommend the best exercises and treatments to help you.

## What to expect in your rehab treatment plan

The results of your pre-treatment assessment allow the rehab professional to develop a **rehab treatment plan**. This will be based on your personal needs and goals, and it might include working with more than one type of cancer rehab specialist. Your rehab professional will share the plan with other members of your primary or cancer care team.

Your rehab treatment plan will include:

- **The treatments recommended.** Treatments might include therapy techniques, exercises, and assistive devices. You may also spend time relearning skills you may have lost or learning new ways to adapt to changes and your environment. Ask your rehab specialist any questions you have.
- **The number of appointments you need and how often you need them.** You may need only a few cancer rehab appointments. Or you may need rehab several times a week for several weeks or months. Appointments typically last 1 to 2 hours.
- **When you will be reassessed.** Some appointments will be used to check your progress. Your rehab plan will be adjusted after you meet each goal or if you have any new symptoms or problems.

## What to expect after a cancer rehab appointment

Most people leave their appointment feeling better than when they came in. However, you may feel sore or tired. If you feel too uncomfortable or are in pain, be sure to tell your rehab specialist.

Your rehab plan may include activities or exercises to do at home between appointments. Completing them will help you make as much progress as you can. If you have a chronic, lasting issue, the in-home plan may become a regular part of your health care.

## What to expect after cancer rehab ends

Cancer rehab can improve your quality of life by helping you regain and maintain a

productive and pain-free lifestyle. Talk with your primary or cancer care team about restarting cancer rehab any time you notice a change in symptoms that:

- Makes you less active
- Keeps you from doing an activity
- Makes it hard to do everyday tasks

You can receive cancer rehab services at any time after a cancer diagnosis, including after treatment is complete.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/what-is-cancer-rehabilitation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/what-is-cancer-rehabilitation.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/what-is-cancer-rehabilitation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/what-is-cancer-rehabilitation.html)

## References

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