

Cancer Rehabilitation

Cancer is the abnormal growth of cells in the body. Its symptoms vary with the type and extent of the disease. Cancer may develop as a result of a complex mix of factors related to environment, lifestyle and genetics. Prognosis is advised by the medical team, and will depend on multiple factors such as the disease stage and type.

How is it treated?

A team of cancer specialists may recommend treatment options such as surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. When cancer and its treatment result in functional limitations, patients may be referred to rehabilitation professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists. They may work as a team to manage potential treatment side effects and to maintain or facilitate functional recovery and wellbeing.

What does rehabilitation involve?

The goals of cancer rehabilitation can vary based on the patient's individual needs.

Goals of rehabilitation may include the prevention of future complications, restoration of lost function, support in psychosocial and physical needs and/or symptom management.

Physiotherapy can help cancer patients by optimising their fitness level, maintaining or improving their functional ability, prescribing exercises and suitable walking aids, as well as equipping caregivers with the necessary skills to care for the patients at home.

Physiotherapists can help with the management of some common cancer side effects such as musculoskeletal pain, muscle weakness, lymphedema, breathlessness and cancer related fatigue.

Occupational therapists help patients to maximise performance and safety in their daily activities. This can be done through retraining of relevant skills, education on symptom management to enhance participation, caregiver's training, as well as equipment prescription. Occupational therapists also help to facilitate engagement in meaningful activities, such as leisure, to improve psychosocial wellbeing.

Speech therapists may assess and manage swallowing and/or communication problems, which may arise during cancer treatment.

Patient's mobility and function will be assessed by respective therapists to determine the treatment needs and required intervention. A multidisciplinary approach will be adopted to tailor treatment plans to facilitate discharge planning from the hospital. Subsequently, relevant outpatient services (individual/group) may be referred upon discharge as necessary.

Some cancer-specific services provided at NUH include the Lymphedema Management Programme, pre- and post-op exercise programme for colorectal cancer patients and group exercise classes for breast cancer patients during and after treatment.

Useful websites

[National University Cancer Institute, Singapore](#)

[Singapore Cancer Society](#)