**Oncology Rehabilitation**

Oncology rehabilitation is a type of physical therapy that helps individuals achieve improved physical function during and after cancer treatment. Oncology physical therapists receive extra training to address the unique needs of individuals undergoing or recovering from cancer surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.

Oncology rehabilitation is not just helpful for people who have had breast cancer. It can help people recovering from most types of cancers, including head and neck, cervical, bladder, prostate and rectal. Surgical treatment of cancer can lead to tissue tightness, scarring, range of motion restrictions, swelling and pain. Physical therapy utilizes manual techniques and gentle exercises to assist in improving tissue quality, endurance, balance, range of motion, circulation and pain.

Radiation treatment can cause fatigue, swelling, and hardening of tissues which may create restrictions in motion and poor tolerance to activity. Oncology rehabilitation can address these side effects with use of energy conservation techniques, range of motion, endurance exercises and tissue/muscle mobilization.

Research shows that a gentle exercise routine can help decrease some of the side effects of chemotherapy, including fatigue, joint pain, neuropathy (nerve symptoms like numbness and tingling), balance issues and difficulty sleeping. Physical therapy can assist in developing a safe and appropriate exercise routine to help reduce these potential chemotherapy side effects.

Among gynecological, urological and even breast cancers, incontinence and pelvic pain are common side effects of oncology treatments. Pelvic floor rehabilitation helps decrease these symptoms by strengthening and/or releasing spasm and tension in the pelvic floor muscles.

Lymphedema is an abnormal swelling that can occur after any type of cancer treatment. A certified lymphedema therapist can help decrease the swelling with Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT). This therapy treatment includes patient education, compression, manual techniques to help move the excess fluid out of the area and exercises to increase circulation and fluid movement.

If you are currently undergoing or recovering from cancer treatment and feel physical therapy may be helpful, ask your oncologist, plastic surgeon, radiologist or general practitioner for a referral. Make sure the physical therapist you select has training specific to oncology rehabilitation and/or pelvic floor rehabilitation.

Recovering from cancer treatment can be a slow process and takes time and patience. But for most people, there is no reason you can’t return to the things you love to do. Resources are available to assist in improving your quality of life during or after cancer treatment.

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