

# Know About Physiotherapy in Palliative Care

## For patients and families

Read this resource to learn:

- why is physiotherapy used in palliative care
- how can physiotherapy help me
- how can activity help me
- how can I see a physiotherapist
- what can I expect when the physiotherapist visits
- what exercises can I do on my own



## **Why is physiotherapy used in palliative care?**

Physiotherapy is part of your palliative care. Physiotherapy is used to help manage the physical symptoms (signs) of cancer and cancer treatment like:

- pain
- trouble breathing
- weakness or problems moving around
- cancer-related fatigue or feeling tired

Physiotherapy can help you feel better and improve your quality of life.

## **How can physiotherapy help me?**

A physiotherapist will work with you to design a plan. The plan will be used to treat the problems that concern you most.

Here are some examples of the types of things that may be included in your plan:

- Getting out of bed
- Sitting in a chair
- Walking
- Using walking aids like a cane or walker
- Doing gentle exercise
- Learning ways to breathe to help you cope with shortness of breath
- Helping make your home safe for you and your family if you want to go home.
- Showing you how to save your energy

At your physiotherapy visits, you will go at your own pace. You can change the time of your physiotherapy session for when you feel at your best. Usually patients have their session 2 to 3 times each week, if they wish.

## **How can exercise help me?**

Exercise will help you:

- Improve your sleep and energy.
- Be able to do as many daily activities as possible by yourself.
- Be able to do as much personal care as possible by yourself.
- Prevent bed sores.
- Reduce stiffness and joint pain.
- Maintain your strength.
- Keep you moving.
- Reduce your risk of falling.

While you get palliative care, you can expect good days and bad days. Try to do a little exercise every day. When you're feeling well, try to do some activity, like sitting in a chair.

## **How can I see a physiotherapist?**

If you would like to see a physiotherapist, talk to your nurse or doctor. You will need a doctor's referral before you can see a physiotherapist in the hospital.

## **What can I expect when the physiotherapist visits?**

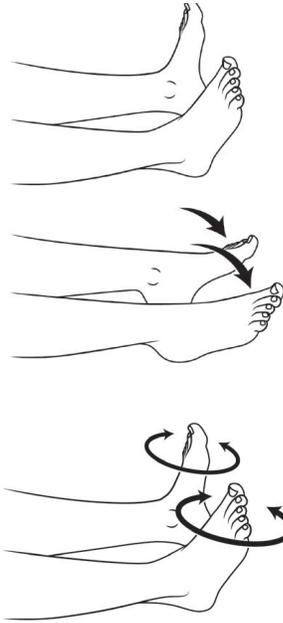
On the first visit, the physiotherapist will assess your physical strength and how well you can move around. They will also talk to you about your goals. An example of a goal may be going for a walk, going outside, or sitting up in a chair.

## What exercises can I do on my own?

Here are some exercises you can do in bed every day:

### Ankle pumps/circles

This exercise can be done sitting up or lying down.



1. Bend both your ankles up and down.

2. Next turn your foot like drawing a circle with your toes.  
Turn to the right (clockwise). Do this 10 times.

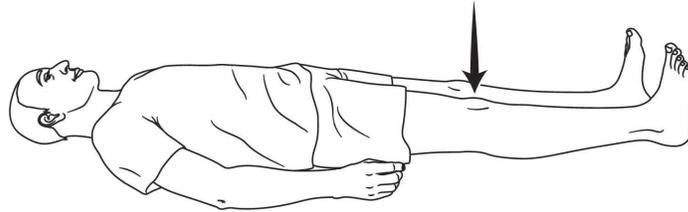
3. Then turn to the left (counterclockwise).  
Do this 10 times.

4. Do this exercise 4 times a day.

## Quad sets

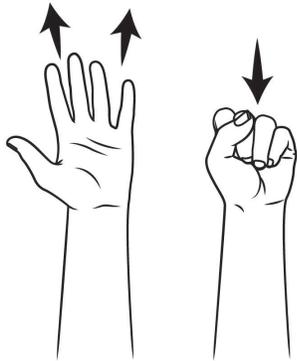
This exercise can be done sitting up or lying down.

1. Tighten the muscles on the front of your thigh (upper leg), by pushing the back of your knee into the bed.



2. Hold for 5 seconds and relax.
3. Do this 10 times, 2 – 4 times a day.

## Finger stretch/fist



1. Straighten your fingers and then bend them into a fist.
2. Hold for 5 seconds and relax.
3. Do this 10 times, 2 – 4 times a day.

## Deep breathing



1. Sit up as much as comfortable.
2. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose. This will expand your chest.
3. Hold for 2 seconds then sigh or breathe out through your mouth.
4. Do this 4 times, once a day.

Your physiotherapist will change or add to these exercises as needed.

These activities shouldn't cause more discomfort. Talk to your physiotherapist if you would like to try new activities while you're on the unit.

## Where can I find more information?

To find a registered physiotherapist in your area go to:

- Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA)  
Website: <https://physiotherapy.ca>
- College of Physiotherapists of Ontario  
Website: <https://portal.collegept.org/public-register>



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