Paediatric Physiotherapy

Patient Information

Physiotherapy for Children with Cancer

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Why might your child need to see a physiotherapist?

During treatment some children experience side effects which can affect their energy and mobility levels. Some of the chemotherapy drugs can cause aches, pains and muscle weakness, particularly in the legs. Children may therefore become less mobile and unable to take part in their usual activities.

The physiotherapist will assess your child’s strength and mobility and monitor progress during treatment, offering exercises and activities to help. They will help your child to get back on their feet if he/she has been unwell and can provide walking aids if needed. You may notice your child tip-toe walking or walking with flat feet due to a combination of chemotherapy drugs and reduced activity. The physiotherapist will teach them stretches, which should be carried out regularly in order to prevent tightness of the leg muscles.

What are the benefits of activity and exercise?

It is important that even when children are being treated for cancer they maintain activity and exercise. Keeping children active helps to keep them healthy and can also help reduce fatigue.

Regular activity and exercise will:
- keep muscles strong and flexible
- keep joints healthy
- improve bone density and prevent bone thinning (osteoporosis)
- improve posture and prevent problems caused by poor posture
- prevent cancer-related fatigue
- stimulate circulation
- prevent excessive weight gain in children taking steroids
- help improve mood

What can you do to help your child?

Encourage your child to be as independent as possible. It is natural to want to help but try to encourage your child to assist you with moving, washing and dressing. It is better to do a little exercise frequently, rather than a lot in one go – this will help reduce fatigue. For younger children, try not to carry them all the time, and encourage walking or crawling, even if it’s over a short distance. Push along or ride-on toys can be helpful and supportive shoes can give confidence and discourage tip-toe walking. For older children, try to avoid prolonged use of a pushchair or wheelchair by encouraging them to get out of it for regular short walks. Your child could push the wheelchair if they need some extra support with walking

Activity ideas and advice:

- Make exercise fun! Children often enjoy pretending to be animals, which could involve crawling, walking on all fours, rolling and jumping.
- Treasure hunt – place objects on surfaces of varying heights.
- Floor/mat work with toys out of reach to encourage movement.
- If your child needs bed rest encourage activity by using arms and legs to pop bubbles, kick a balloon or tickle a cuddly toy with toes.
- Heel walking – ‘walk like a penguin’ – this will help to keep ankle muscles strong and stretch the calf muscles (these muscles often get weak and/or tight).
- Place toys or activities on a table to encourage play whilst standing.
- If stairs are difficult suggest and encourage your child to go up and down on their bottom instead of being carried.
- Children should join in with PE at school.
- Children can still play non-contact sports, even with a Hickman line.

Contacts/further information

Please ring the contact centre and ask to be put through to the paediatric physiotherapy team. Telephone: 01223 245151 Bleep 156 2120