

Rehabilitation for a Child with a Brain Tumor



Bringing home your child after treatment for a brain tumor is a milestone event. But it's not the end of the treatment journey. After brain tumor treatment, it's normal for a child to have after-effects. Your child may have trouble talking, walking, or swallowing. Rehabilitation (rehab) therapy can help with these problems. Rehab can also help your child return to normal activities, such as taking care of their body, interacting with friends, and attending school. Children's brains are able to form new connections as they heal. With time, many months to years, a child can often recover neurological functions that were affected by a brain tumor.

Rehab specialists have likely already been involved in your child's care. They are often part of the treatment team. But they can also be a big help as your child transitions to life after brain tumor treatment. Talk with your child's healthcare provider if you think your child could be helped by working with a specialist. Rehab can be a key part of helping your child be independent. It can give them a sense of well-being and a good quality of life. You and your child may also benefit from joining a support group for families of brain tumor patients.

It's important to know what lies ahead for your child and the rest of your family. Understanding the rehab process may help ease some worries about the next step in your child's recovery.

Types of rehab

Types of rehab therapy your child may need include:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Psychology
- Retraining of thinking skills
- Speech-therapy services

You can learn more about these below.

Physical therapy

If your child is having trouble moving and walking as a result of a tumor or treatment, physical therapy (PT) can help. PT helps improve strength, coordination, and movement through special exercises. PT is managed by a trained healthcare provider called a physical therapist. The therapist can help your child learn different ways to move. They can also show your child how to use special equipment, such as a leg brace or walker to help them safely walk. PT can be done on an outpatient basis. This means your child goes home each day. You will be taught what you can do at home to help your child recover.

Occupational therapy

After treatment for a brain tumor, your child may have trouble doing daily tasks. These can include things like showering, dressing, and eating. A trained occupational therapist will show your child how to regain these skills and be as independent as possible. Occupational therapy (OT) may be done with specific exercises, special devices, or teaching your child a new way to do a task. The therapist may advise putting special equipment in your home to help with safety and mobility. These devices might include rails or grab bars in the bathroom. Health insurance may cover the cost of these things. But check your policy and talk with the therapist before buying anything.

Psychology

It's normal for a child to be scared or sad during and after treatment for the brain tumor. Make it clear that the illness is no one's fault. During this time, your child may be helped by a pediatric psychologist or neuropsychologist. Brain tumors and their treatment can cause short- or long-term problems with behavior, mood, memory, and learning. These experts will do an evaluation. They will come up with a program to help your child move forward. They can help your child deal with the emotional stress of illness. They also can serve as an advocate for your child at school so that they get the attention needed.

Retraining of thinking skills

Attention and memory can be affected by a brain tumor. Children can start to regain these thinking skills by doing simple exercises in workbooks, puzzles, and games. They can improve their ability to analyze and solve problems. Be sure to choose workbooks that are meant for your child's age. Make sure the exercises aren't too hard or too easy. These workbooks can be found at most retail stores and online. Talk about the exercises with your child's healthcare provider before starting them.

Speech therapy services

Communicating may be hard for a child recovering from a brain tumor. This is more likely if the tumor was in a part of the brain that controls speech and language. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) can assess your child. The SLP can help treat any communication problems with speaking exercises, listening activities, or other methods. An SLP can also help with swallowing problems.

Including other family members in rehab

The experience of a childhood brain tumor affects everyone in a family. Try to make special time for siblings. Include them as much as possible in the rehab process. It may also help to consider family counseling or support groups that include siblings. The rehab process focuses on the child recovering from the brain tumor. But it also needs to help the entire family recover from the event.

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