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Prehab could make a difference for you

By Bob Cairo | Special to the Coastal Point
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Physical rehabilitation is a frequent component of recovery after surgery, but physical therapist Bob Cairo says pre-surgery preparation, or prehabilitation, can be just as important.

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You may not be familiar with prehab, but there are a number of medical professionals who believe that prehab can be as important as rehab for some surgical patients. If you or someone you care about is planning for surgery, it's always important to understand what you need to do to position yourself for the best possible outcome.

As we so often talk about during our visits here in the Coastal Point, you need to be an informed consumer. To make a good decision about whether you or someone you care about are in a situation that might mean you could benefit from prehab, you need to understand what it is, what it involves and some of the ways it could be beneficial.

There is a difference between prehab and rehab. Prehab is short for prehabilitation. It is usually ordered before some surgeries to help give you a chance to get your body ready for what is to come. Working with a physical therapist to give your body a head start in areas that can include strengthening, improving joint function, building stability, extending your range of motion, and even developing better balance can be helpful for many people in how they recover.

Rehab is short for rehabilitation. It is care that can help you get back, keep, or improve abilities that you need for daily life. Typically, rehab comes under the care of a physical therapist for surgery, an injury, an event impacting your physical capabilities or even to improve function associated with aging.

You're probably wondering what kind of surgeries could potentially see benefits in the outcome from prehab. I won't list them all, but they include spinal surgery, rotator cuff repair, shoulder or knee replacement or reconstruction, hip replacement or reconstruction, or ACL reconstruction.

Prehab before surgery has another benefit for some people, too. It has to do with what happens after surgery when you are in rehab. Rehab after surgery can be impacted by how tissue is healing, dealing with pain and the ability to achieve the best outcome for your overall functionality, which all can often benefit from prehab. Some other benefits that patients can realize is the need fewer post-operative sessions.

I also hear from patients who tell me they felt they were better prepared for surgery and that the prehabilitation gave them a more positive feeling going into the surgery. And there's one more benefit that can come from prehab: Regardless of how many sessions you have, you get to know your physical therapist and establish a relationship that will carry over to your post-surgery rehabilitation relationship.



When prehab is recommended prior to surgery, it can begin about two months before. The idea here is to give your body the time it needs to achieve some real strides forward. You and your surgeon will likely have a conversation about what the best timing is so you know when you should begin your prehab.

And there's one other little twist, here: Prehab can also make a difference for some people when their doctors feel it will help avoid an injury from occurring or as a method of helping to reduce ongoing pain. This approach to prehab can help some people with improved strength and conditioning, too. Some doctors will order prehab for athletes who want to improve their performance. I often work with patients who are not having surgery, but they need help to build their strength, range of motion and balance. It contributes to mobility and quality of life.

It's important to keep in mind that because every person's situation, needs and conditions can be very different, there is no way to know whether prehab is right for you without taking steps to find out from a medical professional.

The first step is the obvious one, right? Make an appointment with your doctor and talk about it. Your doctor has your medical history and knows what medications you are taking, as well as supplements. If anything has changed, however, you need to share that information. Whether it's a change in medications or supplements that you take or you are having other issues, share all that information. Discuss your interest in prehabilitation. If your doctor agrees, make an appointment with a physical therapist to get an evaluation.

I know I often share this with you, but it's worth repeating because I want you to have a good comfort level and no surprises. After all, this is about your health and your wellbeing. You can expect that your physical therapist will have received information from your doctor, but will want to examine you, too. And here's where a dialogue begins. Your physical therapist will most likely talk about your situation because that's important information to add to what your doctor has shared. Again, this is a team approach. You have to work together and have honest conversations to get the best possible outcome.

The most important thought I want to leave you with is to explore your options and get all the information you need for your particular situation so that you can make the right decision for you. Let's be real here. Everyone wants to get back to their daily routines and be able to enjoy life. I'm always rooting for you to have the best quality of life.



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