

Partnering Fitness Professionals for HOLISTIC RECOVERY

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Benson is the founder of Vigeo Personal Training, Singapore's first studio focused on helping adults above 40 and seniors stay strong, mobile and independent. With a background in sports science, a deep understanding of functional movement and a passion for purposeful coaching, Benson leads a team dedicated to improving quality of life through strength, movement and education.



Dr See is a senior consultant medical oncologist at Parkway Cancer Centre with advanced training from the National Cancer Centre Singapore and MD Anderson Cancer Center. She specialises in breast and gynaecologic cancers and has served in key medical and oncology leadership roles locally and internationally.



From 1990 to 2017, Singapore's life expectancy rose by nearly nine years to 84.8, while healthy life expectancy increased by just over seven years to 74.2. The result is a ten-year gap often marked by chronic disease, frailty and dependence.

As Prime Minister Lawrence Wong noted in his 2025 National Day Rally, the nation's next frontier is healthspan, which refers to the years lived in good health. The question is no longer about how to live longer, but how to live better. Medical advances have extended life, but many added years are spent managing illness and decline. Medicine treats

disease, while exercise restores strength, mobility and confidence.

To truly bridge the gap between lifespan and healthspan, recovery must become a shared effort where doctors and fitness professionals work together to restore health holistically.

The role of medicine in recovery

Modern medicine has transformed survival and recovery. In Singapore, the five-year breast cancer survival rate now exceeds 80% and cardiovascular mortality has fallen by almost 60% since 1990. Yet many survivors face persistent fatigue, muscle loss and reduced independence long after treatment ends. Up to 70% of cancer survivors experience chronic fatigue, one in three older adults has sarcopenia, and one in five over 50 years has osteoporosis.

Medicine saves lives, but exercise helps people live them fully. Guidelines from the American Society of Clinical Oncology,¹ the American College of Sports Medicine,² American Heart Association³ and the World Health Organization⁴ consistently show that structured physical activity improves medical outcomes. For those suffering from cancer, regular moderate activity of about 150 minutes a week reduces treatment-related fatigue by 40% and lowers recurrence by about 24% in breast and colorectal cancers. For those with cardiovascular disease, higher fitness reduces all-cause mortality by 30% and cardiovascular mortality by 50%; and lowers the risk of diabetes by 35%, falls by 30% and bone loss by 20% for older adults.

Improving treatment outcomes

Structured aerobic and resistance training during cancer therapy reduces fatigue, preserves lean mass and improves fitness. In over 14,000 cardiac

patients, exercise-based rehabilitation reduced cardiovascular mortality by 26% and hospitalisation by 18%.

Enhancing quality of life after treatment

A *Nature Medicine* study in metastatic breast cancer found that supervised exercise improved fatigue, pain, cognitive function and social engagement within six months.⁵

Prevention of disease in the future

Exercise is not just therapy. It is **preventive medicine** that benefits nearly every organ system. As illustrated in Pedersen and Saltin's Exercise as Medicine framework,⁶ regular physical activity improves in most areas where few drugs can match the same breadth of benefit.

Exercise helps to improve insulin sensitivity and metabolic health, reduce systemic inflammation, lower blood pressure, enhance balance and prevent falls, support cognitive function and mental wellbeing, maintain healthy body composition and muscle mass, and increase bone mineral density.

By preserving strength, mobility and independence, exercise bridges the gap between disease prevention and long-term functional health.

The therapeutic role of exercise

Most medical interventions focus on either prevention or treatment. Exercise is unique because it fulfils both roles at once, serving as a preventive shield and a therapeutic partner that becomes a powerful and active extension of medical care. Below are some ways in which exercise complements medical care.

- **Cancer care:** Reduces fatigue, enhances tolerance to chemotherapy and radiation and improves survivorship.

- **Cardiac rehabilitation:** Lowers mortality and recurrent events and improves vascular function.
- **Metabolic disease:** Enhances insulin sensitivity and reduces blood glucose.
- **Neurological conditions:** Restores balance and motor control through neuroplastic adaptation in stroke and Parkinson's disease.
- **Musculoskeletal and frailty care:** Rebuilds mobility, reduces pain and improves function.
- **Mental and emotional health:** Reduces anxiety and depression, improves mood.

Complementary roles: medical and fitness professionals

Medicine and movement are two sides of the same continuum of care. Both share a single goal: to help patients recover fully and live well.

Medical professionals play the central role of diagnosis, treatment and medical oversight. They determine safety parameters, identify contraindications and set the clinical direction for rehabilitation. Increasingly, many also advocate the early integration of physical activity as part of treatment to improve tolerance, recovery and long-term outcomes.

Fitness professionals extend this continuum by translating medical guidance into safe, structured and progressive movement. They align with the doctor's plan and ensure that each session supports clinical goals. They also provide the behavioural and motivational support that sustains adherence.

Doctors direct and monitor care; fitness professionals operationalise and reinforce it. Together, they close the gap between treatment and true recovery.

Case studies of integrating medicine and movement

These cases from our shared care show how medical guidance and structured exercise can restore independence and confidence after cancer treatment. These examples highlight how medical and fitness professionals can work together to help survivors not only recover but also thrive.

Case 1: Older cancer survivor with low bone density and back pain

A woman in her seventies, after completing cancer treatment, presented with low bone density, reduced muscle mass and persistent back discomfort. Under Dr See's clearance and oversight, she began a strength and mobility programme designed by Benson. Through gradual loading and movement control, she regained muscle, stability and confidence. She now moves without pain, hikes abroad and enjoys active time with her grandson.

Case 2: Middle-aged cancer survivor with osteopenia and joint pain

A woman in her late forties faced early osteopenia and joint pain after treatment by Dr See. Following medical review, she undertook with Benson a tailored resistance training programme focused on bone strength and functional control. Within months, her pain eased, bone density improved and confidence returned, allowing her to resume daily activities without fear.

Collaboration and finding the right partner

Collaboration is crucial because partnership with the right fitness professional ensures that exercise supports medical care safely and effectively. Here are some traits doctors should consider when searching for a fitness professional to partner:

- **Clinical awareness:** Understands medical conditions, recognises contraindications and adapts exercise for patients with chronic disease, recovery needs or functional limitations.
- **Recovery focus:** Aims to improve strength, reduce side effects and support recovery during and after treatment.
- **Health-first philosophy:** Prioritises function, mobility, strength and long-term wellbeing.
- **Scientific foundation:** Applies knowledge of physiology, biomechanics and behaviour to design safe, effective and measurable programmes.
- **Collaborative mindset:** Integrates medical guidance, aligns training with

treatment goals and maintains open communication for coordinated care.

Doctors and fitness professionals should establish clear communication channels and agreed protocols for information sharing. It is encouraged to have regular progress updates, feedback loops and shared documentation to ensure continuity of care. Doctors can also benefit from observing recovery-focused training sessions to understand structure, safety and patient engagement. Both parties can thus jointly co-create patient wellness plans where medicine and movement work together to achieve better outcomes.

Future direction

Medicine preserves life while exercise restores its quality. Together, they create a continuum of care that neither can achieve alone. In Singapore, organisations such as Vigeo Personal Training are leading this integration, helping patients move from treatment to lasting recovery. As life expectancy continues to rise faster than healthy life expectancy, uniting medical and movement expertise is key to closing the gap so more Singaporeans can live not just longer but better. ♦

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