

When a Member Shares a Diagnosis

A 3-part checklist for gym owners and coaches

Built with **Yani Fish**, Head of Exercise Oncology at [Compete for a Cure](#)

A member just told you they have cancer. Your gym can keep them training, safely, through treatment. You don't need all the answers. You need a plan, the right specialist, and a team that knows what to say.

STEP 1

1 Have the private conversation

Do this first, before you change a thing.

- ☐ Find a quiet moment away from the class floor.
- ☐ Thank them for telling you. Let them know they're not alone and the gym has their back.
- ☐ Ask about their treatment plan: surgery, chemo, radiation, and the timing.
- ☐ Ask what they want from the gym. Most people say some version of "I don't want to stop training. I just don't know what I can do."
- ☐ Ask who can know: everyone, just the coaches, or no one.
- ☐ Confirm their medical team has cleared them to train.

Questions to ask:

"What does your treatment plan look like?"

"If we could do anything to help, what would it be?"

"Do you want people to know, or should we keep this between us?"

"Are you OK with the coaches knowing, so we can keep you safe?"

STEP 2

2 Decide if you need a specialist

Good intentions aren't a training plan. Know where your lane ends.

Likely handle it like an injury return

Lump removed only, with no further treatment

Cleared by their medical team (often around 6 weeks post-op)

Ease them back in slowly, the way you would after any surgery

Bring in a specialist right away

Chemo or radiation

Major surgery, like a mastectomy

Anything else, or anything you're unsure about

How to find a cancer rehab specialist:

- ☐ Contact [Compete for a Cure](#). They support people with breast cancer and can point you to specialists for other cancers too.
- ☐ Contact the charity for that specific cancer and ask for a cancer rehab specialist near you.
- ☐ Search "cancer rehab specialist" plus your city or training style.

Online courses, like [Compete for a Cure's Breast Cancer Basics for Coaches](#), can also help your coaches know what to expect. They're a resource, not a certification.

STEP 3

3 Quietly adjust how your gym runs

Keep them safe without making them feel singled out.

COACHING

- ☐ Use RPE (1 to 10) instead of percentages. A 7 on treatment week is still a 7.
- ☐ Don't scale them back to nothing. Find what they can still do safely from their new starting point.
- ☐ Keep them at the same level as the class: standing when the class is standing, on the floor when the class is on the floor.
- ☐ Check in before class: "Here's today's workout. How do you feel about it?" Have a similar movement ready if the answer is no.
- ☐ Follow the specialist's programming, and give them their own version of the workout where you can.

YOUR TEAM

- ☐ With the member's OK, brief your coaches on what they might see: changes in appearance, low-energy days, and signs they shouldn't train today.
- ☐ Agree on any safety check the specialist needs, and ask it quietly at the start of class.
- ☐ After class, send the specialist a quick note on what the member did and how it went.
- ☐ Set a regular check-in with the specialist to retest and adjust. (Yani's gym does every 8 weeks.)

THE SPACE

- ☐ Wipe down equipment before they use it.
- ☐ Set up their station before class so their modifications don't stand out.

What to Say (and What Not to Say)

INSTEAD OF

"How are you feeling?"

avoiding them because you're worried about saying the wrong thing.

making every conversation about the diagnosis.

SAY

"How was your week?"

hello. Talk about the weather, the workout, their weekend. They're the same person they were before.

nothing about it, unless they bring it up.

Rallying the Gym (With Permission)

- ☐ Ask first. Some members want the support. Some want privacy.
- ☐ If they're OK being named: run a fundraiser workout, an in-house comp, or a trivia night for them.
- ☐ If they want privacy: raise money "for someone close to our hearts," or quietly cover their membership.
- ☐ Never share a member's diagnosis without their OK.

Watch the full webinar: pushpress.com/resources/support-members-through-cancer

Find support or donate: competeforacure.org

