



Personal Trainer Spotlight: Carol Michaels

By [NFPT Team](#) in [Personal Trainer Spotlights](#)

This month's Trainer Spotlight is Carol Michaels. Carol is a nationally recognized, highly educated cancer exercise specialist and consultant and has been a fitness professional for more than 20 years. She is the creator of NFPT's Cancer Recovery Specialist course. Carol is also IDEA's 2016 Fitness Trainer of the Year.

How long have you been in the fitness industry?

I have been a fitness professional for more than 20 years and am the founder of Recovery Fitness[®], a nationally recognized exercise program designed to help cancer patients recover from surgery and treatments. I own and operate Recovery Fitness and Carol Michaels Fitness in West Orange, New Jersey. In addition, I am a consultant, author, presenter, and on the advisory board of numerous health organizations.



Why did you become a trainer in the first place?

There were two converging paths that brought me to my current roles. One has been my love of movement, which evolved into my personal training career. The other is my experience with those who suffer from cancer.

Cancer has been part of my world for over thirty years. My mother, father, and many other family members and friends have battled this disease. Having cared for and watched loved ones suffer and oftentimes die from this disease, one of my life goals was to do whatever I could to help the healing process. I needed to make an impact on a deep level.

Cancer patients often have a difficult time recovering and develop frozen shoulder, stiffness, and numbness due to surgery and treatments. Because many of these side effects can be prevented through proper exercise, I needed to create a series of stretches and strengthening exercises to help eliminate or minimize these side effects.



What motivates you to do this job and stay in this tough industry?

I am motivated by being able to help people to improve their quality of life. I know that I make a meaningful difference in people's lives, day in and day out. This goal of improving the quality of life for cancer survivors gave me the strength and perseverance to establish my program.

What is the biggest challenge for you as a personal trainer?

My biggest challenge as a personal trainer was to gain acceptance by the medical community. This did not come easily. It can be difficult to reach medical professionals who are busy and focused on their patients. But with hard work and tenacity this can be accomplished.

In addition, it was very difficult to get Recovery Fitness accepted by the medical community because years ago cancer patients were told to go home and rest and not to lift anything. I was very early, if not one of the first to create and push to gain acceptance for exercise programs for cancer survivors. Some needed to overcome a preconceived bias that disregarded the importance of exercise in the recovery process. I needed to demonstrate that not only was the exercise important, the exercise program had to be tailored to meet the needs of patients who had just gone through complicated surgery or other treatment.

This took great perseverance. I met as many oncology health professionals as possible and was able to demonstrate the efficacy of the Recovery Fitness program and how it could help

their patients.

What is your biggest accomplishment in the fitness industry?

The big accomplishment was the creation of the Recovery Fitness® cancer exercise program and its establishment in two major medical centers and other facilities. I have developed relationships with many of the top surgeons and oncologists in New Jersey and they now understand the role the fitness industry can play in the improvement of their patients' health and lives.

The creation of the Recovery Fitness program lead to my book *Exercises for Cancer Survivors*, DVDs, the NFPT continuing education course, awards, and numerous speaking and writing opportunities.

What do you think separates you from the rest of personal trainers out there to win this award?

Throughout my career as a personal trainer, I have helped thousands of cancer patients and many others to improve their quality of life. I have been a trailblazer in using exercise to assist in the treatment of those with cancer, lymphedema, and osteoporosis.

I mentor other fitness professionals in the Recovery Fitness method. Teaching personal trainers how to work with their clients who have cancer gives the trainers the ability to help their clients during this very difficult diagnosis. Clients feel comfortable knowing that their trainers have studied cancer exercise and have been taught by an expert with decades of experience. In order to



help other personal trainers work with their clients who have cancer, I developed and created the NFPT continuing education course: *Cancer Recovery Specialist*. I have also recorded webinars on this topic for the Clinical Exercise Physiologist Association and several health organizations. By presenting at the IDEA Personal Trainer Institute and numerous health conferences, I helped personal trainers to understand what their clients are facing when diagnosed with cancer.

In addition to creating a medically endorsed cancer exercise program, I have developed an Osteoporosis Exercise program. Osteoporosis affects a large percentage of our population. Many of the traditional exercise programs are not safe for those with the disease.

I am on the board of numerous health organizations. Additionally, I am a speaker for corporate wellness programs, fitness organizations, community events, and cancer related organizations on fitness and health issues. I also has appeared on health related radio and television programs, and am an author of a chapter in the e-book called *Ten to Thrive*, and published in numerous magazines, newsletters, blogs and medical journals.

Any advice for other trainers out there?

You must have tenacity, perseverance, mental fortitude, a thick skin, and commitment to serving others to be successful.

Becoming an expert in the exercise of a special population can be a rewarding aspect of your fitness career. As our life span increase, we will see more clients affected by disease such as Parkinson's, MS , arthritis, cancer and heart disease. Cardiac rehab centers are all around us. Physical therapists are dealing with the initial rehab for knee and hip replacements and other orthopedic situations. At this time, in many areas of this country, it can be difficult to find Parkinson's, MS, or cancer fitness professional. There is a need in the health care system for exercise programming for those afflicted by certain diseases.



For those of you thinking about starting a career in fitness it is never too late to start the certification process with NFPT. This is one field where age can actually be a benefit when working with certain populations. It gives you the ability to relate to and understand the physical changes that the baby boomers are dealing with. This demographic can feel comfortable and connect

with those of similar age.

Get to know the doctors, physical therapists, etc. in your community. Set up meetings and presentations with health professionals in your area. They are a great source of referrals

Commit to constant, ongoing education so that you can perform to your best ability. This is accomplished by reading everything in your field that is available and taking continuing education courses.

For example, I subscribe to and review a wide variety of health and oncology publications, and attend cancer seminars. By staying informed on the latest reconstructions and treatments I

can understand my clients' situations and develop exercise programs that will give them the best results. In addition, I communicate with their health professionals regularly so that I can understand the particular health issues in order to create the best fitness program for their unique situation. My clients' health professionals receive monthly fitness reports detailing the changes in their patients' endurance, strength, posture, balance, and range of motion.