

Inspirational 86-year-old on her feet hours after operation

Strength and balance classes have been worth their weight in gold for 86-year-old Shirley Van Grinsven from Wainoni.

Not even a major operation due to cancer could keep Shirley in bed, and she was on her feet just hours later. Shirley has been going to strength and balance classes in the Burwood area for five or six years and credits this as contributing to her remarkable post-op recovery.

Shirley was diagnosed with cancer and needed a hysterectomy just before the national COVID-19 lockdown in late March. Her instructor Krissy Christensen, motivated her to exercise at home, go for small walks and practice deep breathing.

“If I hadn’t done all the exercising and walking, I wouldn’t have recovered as well as I have. I told the hospital staff about my classes and my instructor and how it was all her doing. I will be forever grateful,” says Shirley.

“All the doctors and nurses were so surprised how well I came through the surgery. My recovery was so good that I was back in the ward by 1pm and out of bed walking down the corridor by 4.30pm, feeling very proud of myself.

“When the hospital staff saw me coming, they shook their heads in amazement, gave me the thumbs up and said ‘What a legend!’ The surgeon told me they were using my remarkable story of recovery to inspire and motivate other patients younger than me, who were anxious about surgery.

“I also owe a lot to my fellow classmates who all supported me and sent me their best wishes. Not only do we exercise, we have a cuppa, socialise and connect with others.” Since the quakes – which caused significant damage to buildings and land in Wainoni – many of the group members have moved across town. But it hasn’t stopped them and now they travel across to Burwood for the classes.

“The classes are gentle, and you can take it at your own pace. We have a lot of laughs and reminisce while we move to the music we grew up with.”

There are nearly 200 approved strength and balance classes running weekly within the Canterbury DHB region. These classes are part of the Live Stronger for Longer Project, which supports older adults to live independently and injury-free in their own homes by reducing their risk of falling.

Sport Canterbury Community Strength and Balance Project Leader Rebecca Logan says this is a collective, whole of system approach to falls prevention. It encompasses in-home support, pharmacy, and community strength and balance classes.

“One of the goals of the Live Stronger for Longer project is to ensure that every person in New Zealand, aged 65 years and over, can attend a strength and balance class within their community,” says Rebecca.

[Local classes can be found through an interactive map on the Live Stronger for Longer website.](#) You can also contact Sport Canterbury for more information – sport[at]sportcanterbury.org.nz or 03 373 5060.



Shirley Van Grinsven (right) with her strength and balance class instructor Krissy Christensen.



Shirley Van Grinsven in a strength and balance class.