

# Our People: Amanda Cunningham, Registered Kinesiologist and Rehabilitation Trainer

**Role:** Some people are lucky enough to live their passion at work, and Amanda Cunningham is one of them. She loves exercising, and as a rehabilitation trainer with the Cardiac Rehabilitation and Secondary Prevention Program (CRSP), she helps motivate patients who have heart disease to exercise as part of their recovery. "I offer them a really powerful tool for their health – exercise – and then empower them to use it."

Her role involves educating and supervising patients as they begin a new exercise program. In keeping with the whole-person approach at St. Joseph's, the process of improving patients' physical conditions begins with a mental exercise. During their initial visits, Amanda focuses on really getting to know them. She uses motivational interviewing, a practice she finds especially helpful to guide patients toward discovering their own reasons to work hard at fitness. One of the most satisfying parts of her job is "being the person who is there to support someone going through a challenging time."

**Typical Day:** Amanda meets with patients one-on-one in the cardiac rehabilitation gym, or in a group setting at the downtown YMCA, where a partnership between the Y and CRSP allows patients to exercise under supervision. She dispenses what's known as "exercise prescription" and sets up a personalized plan to meet each patient's unique needs. Amanda says, "The best part of my job is that there are little successes in every one of the patients," like when they return to activities that wouldn't have been possible before rehabilitation.



**Personal Touch:** Amanda brings active listening to her job every day so she can truly understand the barriers to exercise her patients may be facing. She took on one of those barriers personally, after developing gestational diabetes during pregnancy. She learned what it's like to have to check her blood sugar many times a day. "It really hurts!" she says, but that experience increased her empathy and understanding for patients with diabetes.

Amanda also took a diabetes education course on her own time at the Michener Institute. Her knowledge of diabetes is especially helpful now that patients with the disease are referred to the CRSP Program. "One of the things I love about St. Joseph's is the collaboration between programs," noting that patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and diabetes can receive exercise guidance from the kinesiologists here.

**Just for Fun:** After graduating from the University of Windsor, Amanda and a friend spent three months travelling across Australia and New Zealand. That thirst for adventure is another passion, and one she now shares with her husband. Since the birth of their son four years ago, they've visited the U.K., Iceland and Costa Rica with him by their side. In the last year, their baby daughter joined them on their travels. "I think it changes them," she says, hoping that those trips and future ones will inspire an explorer mindset in their children.

When she's at home with her family, she gets to do what she does at work. Amanda makes exercise a part of playtime to keep her kids excited about being active. So you might find a four-year-old running a "circuit" at her house, complete with a push-up station and a somersault room.