

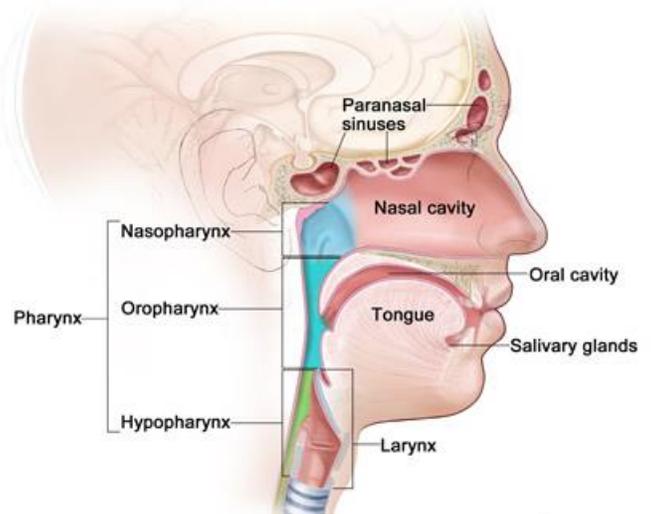
# HEAD AND NECK CANCER FACT SHEET for CONSUMERS

## TYPES OF HEAD AND NECK CANCER

Head and neck cancer accounts for 3% of all cancers.

Types of head and neck cancer include:

- Tongue
- Oral cavity (mouth)
- Nasal cavity and sinus
- Jaw
- Larynx
- Pharynx
- Salivary glands



## OPTIONS FOR HEAD AND NECK CANCER TREATMENTS

Each individual is unique and requires a unique medical treatment plan. It is best to discuss with your doctor regarding your specific course of treatment. The following are the definitions of different treatment options:

- *Tumor resection:* Abnormal tissue is removed through surgery. Tissue from the borders is examined and removed until the borders contain only healthy cells.
- *Neck dissection:* Lymph nodes in the neck that contain cancer cells are removed.
- *Radiation therapy:* High doses of radiation (high energy waves) are used to kill cancer cells. Radiation can be done in combination with chemotherapy for head and neck cancer. The course of these treatments is determined by your doctor and is unique to your case.
- *Chemotherapy:* Drugs are used to kill cancer cells or to stop them from dividing.
- *Reconstruction:* Tissues from other areas of the body or artificial implants are used to rebuild areas where the tumor was removed.

## POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CANCER TREATMENTS

### 1) SURGERY

- Problems with talking, breathing, chewing, and swallowing
- Swelling in the face and neck
- Neck and shoulder pain
- Decreased neck and shoulder motion
- Muscle weakness of the face, neck, and shoulder
- Sensation changes near the surgery area(s)
- Development of poor posture
- Scar tissue tightness
- Pain, stiffness, and swelling in areas where tissues have been taken for reconstruction

This Head and Neck Cancer fact sheet is a public service from APTA and the Oncology Section, APTA. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional health care.

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## **POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CANCER TREATMENTS (continued)**

### **2) RADIATION THERAPY**

- Skin redness, irritation, blisters, or breakdown
- Pain with movement of the radiated area
- Excessive scar tissue build-up (during or any time after radiation)
- Dry mouth, loss of taste and/or appetite
- Sensation changes in the mouth, face, head neck, and shoulders
- Jaw pain and difficulty with mouth opening
- Increased risk of infection
- Fatigue, decreased endurance, and muscle weakness

### **3) CHEMOTHERAPY**

- Fatigue
  - Hair loss
  - Low blood cell counts causing increased risk of bruising, bleeding, infection, and anemia
  - Appetite changes, nausea and vomiting
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## **HOW WILL PHYSICAL THERAPY HELP ME?**

Physical therapists are experts in movement and function. A physical therapist can help you:

- Regain strength, function, and independence
- Learn to manage side effects of cancer treatments
- Return to your previous work and recreational activities
- Establish healthy lifestyle habits for life-long wellness

To get started, you will need to be evaluated by a physical therapist to determine what interventions **WILL MOST BENEFIT YOU**. A physical therapy evaluation may include:

- Measurements of your neck, mouth, and shoulder strength, motion, and quality of movement
- Assessment of the movement of your scar and other related tissues
- Assessment of your cardiovascular endurance
- Assessment of your posture and body mechanics with daily activities (lifting, carrying, etc.)

Your physical therapist will perform the following interventions in your treatment sessions:

- Skilled manual therapy
  - Instruct you in functional stretching and strengthening exercises
  - Help you establish a regular exercise routine
  - Provide education on steps you can take to optimize your recovery
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## **HOW DO I FIND A PHYSICAL THERAPIST?**

If you think you may benefit from physical therapy, ask your physician to refer you to a physical therapist who specializes in this treatment area. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) offers a "Find A PT" database at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org). You can also follow the link to this database by visiting APTA's Oncology Section public resources page at [www.oncologypt.org](http://www.oncologypt.org).

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PHYSICAL THERAPIST

### 1) BEFORE CANCER TREATMENT:

- What can I do to improve my neck and shoulder motion and strength?

### 2) TWO WEEKS TO THREE MONTHS AFTER SURGERY

- What can I do to decrease pain and swelling?
- How do I make sure that my scars heal well?
- How do I know if my scar is infected?
- How can I improve the movement of my neck and arms?
- What type of aerobic exercise can I do? When can I start exercising?
- What can I do to improve my posture?
- What other services would I benefit from?
  - Your physical therapist may provide you with referrals to services such as:
    - Professional psychological support
    - Support groups
    - Community exercise programs
    - Occupational therapy
    - Speech therapy
    - Nutrition and weight management
    - Palliative care for pain management
- Tell your therapist about your goals and activities that are meaningful to you. This will allow them to better help you return to those activities.

### 3) GREATER THAN 3 MONTHS AFTER SURGERY

- What types of regular exercises should I do?
- How can I modify exercises to be safe and prevent injury?
- How do I know if I am doing too much or too little exercise?

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## LYMPHEDEMA

Lymphedema is a side effect of cancer treatment that can occur immediately after your surgery or at any time during your recovery process. The removal of lymph nodes and /or radiation to the head and neck can lead to decreased circulation of fluids in the tissues in the head and neck. This can cause prolonged swelling. For more information, you can refer to the APTA Oncology Section's Fact Sheet on Lymphedema. Your doctor or physical therapist can answer your questions regarding lymphedema, which may include:

- How do I know if I have lymphedema?
- What stretches and exercises can I do to decrease my edema?
- How do I protect my skin and reduce the risk of worsening lymphedema?
- Will I benefit from compression garments?
- How do I know if I have an infection? What do I do if I think I have an infection?

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## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES:

- National Cancer Institute: [www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/head-and-neck](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/head-and-neck)
- Cancer Care: [www.cancercare.org/diagnosis/head\\_and\\_neck\\_cancer](http://www.cancercare.org/diagnosis/head_and_neck_cancer)
- American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org/cancer/oralcavityandoropharyngealcancer/](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/oralcavityandoropharyngealcancer/)
- Head and Neck Cancer Support International, Inc.: [www.hncsupport.org](http://www.hncsupport.org)
- Support for People with Oral and Head and Neck Cancer: [www.spohnc.org](http://www.spohnc.org)
- APTA Oncology Section's Lymphedema Fact Sheet: <http://www.oncologypt.org/pdfs/fact-sheets/LymphedemaFactSheetFinal.pdf>