

# PELVIC MUSCLE HEALTH FOLLOWING CANCER TREATMENT Fact Sheet For Consumers

## **What are the Pelvic Muscles?**

The health of the muscles, joints and ligaments in your pelvic region is important. The muscles in your pelvic region, known as your pelvic floor muscles, span from the tip of your tailbone to the front of the pelvis; they provide structural support and play a role in many regulatory functions. The strength and function of these muscles help with bowel and bladder function, sexual pleasure and postural support.

## **How Does Cancer Affect Pelvic Health?**

Cancers that affect the hormonal systems, bladder, bowel or gynecologic systems can cause changes to the pelvic muscles. Changes can happen in both male and female cancer survivors. Pelvic muscle function can be affected by some medical interventions used to treat your cancer including: surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and hormonal treatments. If you experienced any of the following cancers, you should consider the health of your pelvic muscles:

FEMALE			MALE	
Anal	Cervical	Uterine	Anal	Penile
Bladder	Colorectal	Vaginal	Bladder	Prostate
Breast	Ovarian	Vulvar	Colorectal	Testicular

## **How Do I know if I Have Pelvic Muscle Changes Related to My Treatments?**

There is no one specific way of determining if cancer treatments are causing changes to your pelvic floor musculature's structure and function, as each person's experience is different. Here are some common signs and symptoms of pelvic floor muscle issues:

- Bowel or bladder unwanted leakage (incontinence)
- Urinary or fecal frequency or urgency
- Constipation
- Pain or difficulty with sexual function
- Pain with penetration
- Painful or tight scars in the pelvic region
- Swelling in pelvic region, abdomen or legs
- Pain in the pelvic region with activity (including walking, exercise, or rolling in bed)

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## **What is Physical Therapy?**

Physical therapists are experts in movement and function, especially when movement involves changes in “normal” movement patterns. Physical therapists are dedicated to promoting health and wellness of all individuals through preventing functional decline and the development of certain conditions. To learn more about physical therapy and physical therapists, please visit the American Physical Therapy Association’s (APTA’s) website at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org).

## **How Can Physical Therapy Help Me?**

Physical therapists can perform an evaluation on the pelvic floor muscles and related structures. There are multiple areas that physical therapists may help with including:

- Regaining strength, function, and independence
- Learning to manage side effects of cancer treatments
- Returning to your previous activities
- Establishing healthy lifestyle habits for life-long wellness

## **Questions to Ask Your Physical Therapist**

- What should I expect when getting a pelvic health exam?
- What experience do you have treating conditions like mine?
- Are there changes to my lifestyle that can be made to help my pelvic muscle health?
- What type of exercises should I be doing?
- What other services would I benefit from?

## **How Do I Find a Physical Therapist?**

If you think you may benefit from physical therapy, APTA offers a “Find A PT” database at [www.choosopt.com](http://www.choosopt.com) that can help you find a physical therapist who specializes in oncology rehabilitation. Insert “cancer” in the Practice Focus area.

You can also visit APTA Oncology’s consumer resources page at [www.oncologypt.org](http://www.oncologypt.org).

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Disclaimer: This fact sheet is a public service from APTA Oncology. It is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the subject.