

# HOPE & HEALING

A guide to helping survivors navigate through their journey

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Fall 2021 Issue

Northside Hospital Cancer Institute Call Center: [404.531.4444](tel:404.531.4444)



## Sexual Health for Cancer Survivors

By: *Jennifer Byers, PT, DPT, PRPC*

Survivorship is often multifaceted and can include an attempt to make healthy lifestyle choices to feel good and confident post-treatment. One of the areas where individuals may struggle to feel supported is sexual health. Many changes to the body can occur during treatment, which can lead to a different kind of sexual experience. There are several medical interventions and conservative therapies to explore that may help with confidence and sexual enjoyment.



Changes in sexual health can occur following cancer treatments (specifically to the sexual organs).

### These changes can include:

- Erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation
- Pelvic pain from surgical scar restriction or radiation changes
- Pain from vaginal dryness or stenosis (narrowing of the vaginal canal) following radiation or early onset of menopause
- Changes in bowel and bladder function, including urgency and frequency or incontinence, which can impact sexual confidence

Changes in sexual health can occur following cancer treatments to other areas of the body as well due to fatigue, pain in treated areas, changes in mobility and decreased libido.

### These changes can include:

- Anxiety, depression and other self-esteem changes
- Post-surgical pain or mobility restrictions
- Pain and neuropathy following oncology treatments
- Long-term fatigue

While the changes above can seem discouraging, there are solutions. For help attaining a positive sexual experience, consider the suggestions below:

✓	Find a pelvic health physical therapist for conservative symptom management, which can include pelvic floor muscle training, relaxation techniques or manual therapy for scar tissue or tense muscles.
✓	Speak with a physician about erectile dysfunction, as many medical treatment options are available including medications, penile implants, penile injections as well as surgical options; physical therapy conservative management can also be helpful.
✓	Seek sexual counseling for added support during the survivorship phase.
✓	Practice deep breathing techniques to allow for optimal relaxation and pain management.
✓	Try various positions during sexual intercourse to find pain free positions.
✓	Use a mirror to become familiar with genitals and improve confidence.
✓	Utilize a vaginal dilator with instruction from a pelvic floor physical therapist to desensitize the pelvic floor muscles and improve readiness for vaginal intercourse.
✓	Try a water-based lubricant for vaginal intercourse or discuss a daily vaginal moisturizer with your physician if vaginal dryness is an issue.
✓	Consider daily exercise such as yoga or walking to help with improving pain, blood flow, mental health and ultimately the sexual experience.

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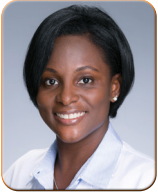
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Please click [here](#) to participate in our short (two-question) subscriber survey!



## ASK AN EXPERT



### Anal Cancer Screening Recommendations

By: Erin King-Mullins, MD, FACS, FASCRS

Anal cancer remains one of the rarest forms of cancer, yet there has been a steady increase in cases over the past few decades with more women than men developing the disease. Are there certain populations that are more at risk? If so, how often and when should those groups be screened for anal cancer?

A resounding yes! When I began offering anal cancer screening several years ago, the target population included individuals (both men and women) living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) with a focus on men who have sex with men (MSM). I began seeing many women with anal cancer and pre-cancer and wondered why. I found that women with a history of high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) strains and a history of cervical/vulvar/vaginal cancer or pre-cancer were at quite a significant risk of developing anal cancer and pre-cancer.

Women are twice as likely as men to develop anal cancer and one and a half times as likely to die from the disease. There is risk even in the absence of participating in anal intercourse. Once an HPV-related advanced gynecological disease has been diagnosed in a woman, she should have an anorectal examination. While there is no standard guideline yet to the manner and frequency of anal screening in this population, it would be individualized based upon the results of the initial examination, and the patient's overall clinical status.

Are survivors of gynecologic malignancies more likely to develop anal cancer? If so, are there certain signs or symptoms that they should be aware of?

Yes, this is a high-risk population. Signs and symptoms may include but are not limited to anal/rectal pain, bleeding, pressure, fullness, irritation and difficulty with defecation.

Do you recommend that patients who contract HPV be screened for anal cancer?

Not all strains of HPV have been linked to the development of cancer. Those who are diagnosed with one of the strains classified as high-risk should undergo an anorectal examination. This is independent of engaging in anal intercourse.

Are there any activities that can increase the risk of anal cancer?

Sexual contact is how the HPV virus is transmitted in the anogenital area. Abstinence is the only means by which to avoid transmission. Limiting sexual partners and condom use can aid in decreasing the risk of transmission. Please note that the HPV vaccine is recommended for men and women ages 9-45 to protect against the development of cancer from the high-risk strains. While the best means of prevention is to be vaccinated before initiation of sexual activity (target age 9-12 years), it is still recommended up to age 45, even if one has already contracted HPV.

Do gynecologists perform an anal cancer screening as a part of their annual women's exam?

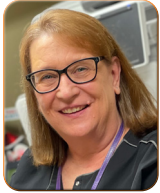
This is not typically a part of the annual women's exam. Some gynecologists may perform this based upon their patient population and the patient's underlying risk. When in doubt, ask your provider.



Do you have a question you would like answered by an expert or a story to share in a future issue of Hope & Healing? If so, please send your questions or stories to [survivornewsletter@northside.com](mailto:survivornewsletter@northside.com).



## BOOST YOUR HEALTH & WELLNESS



### Artificial Sweeteners Versus Natural Sweeteners: What to Know

By: Rebecca Perez, RDN, CSO, LD

Artificial sweeteners (also called sugar substitutes) are substances that are used instead of natural sweeteners to sweeten foods and beverages. Because artificial sweeteners are much sweeter than table sugar, smaller amounts (200 to 20,000 times less) are needed to create the same level of sweetness.

Questions about artificial sweeteners and cancer arose when early studies showed that cyclamate in combination with saccharin caused bladder cancer in laboratory animals. However, results from additional studies of these sweeteners have not provided clear evidence of an association with cancer in humans. Similarly, studies of other FDA-approved sweeteners have not demonstrated clear evidence of an association with cancer in humans.

Common artificial sweeteners\* include:

Generic Name	Brand Name
Aspartame	NutraSweet® and Equal®
Sucralose	Splenda®
Acesulfame K	ACK, Sweet One®, Sunett®
Saccharin	Sweet'N Low®
Stevia	Truvia®
Xylitol	-

\*For more information about artificial sweeteners, contact the FDA at 1.888.SAFEFOOD (1.888.723.3366).

Oncology nutrition services are available throughout many of our NHCI locations. Please call [404.236.8036](tel:404.236.8036).

Natural sweeteners may seem healthier than processed sugar (granulated sugar); however, small traces of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals are not enough to make a significant difference when it comes to your health. Natural sweeteners are all “empty calories,” and those empty calories can contribute to weight gain, which can increase the risk of cancer. Several types of cancer, including postmenopausal breast, endometrial and colon cancer are linked to obesity.

The American Heart Association recommends that women have no more than six teaspoons (25 grams) and men have no more than nine teaspoons (37 grams) of added sugar per day.

Common natural sweeteners include:

Honey	Table Sugar, Sugar in the Raw®, Brown Sugar	
Maple syrup	Agave Nectar	
Dates	Coconut Sugar	
Molasses	Beet Sugar	

Instead of avoiding one particular kind of sugar, try to limit added sugars of any kind, like those in soda, candy and other sweets. Also, be on the lookout for added sugars in foods like jarred pasta sauces and condiments (ketchup, salsa, etc.).

Overall, read the nutrition label for added sugars and try not to eat more than the recommended amount per day.

### Recipe Corner: Avocado Deviled Eggs

**Ingredients:**

- 12 eggs
- 2 medium avocados, chopped
- 1 medium tomato, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons red onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Sprinkle of paprika
- ½ jalapeno pepper, minced (optional)

**Nutrition Information:**

Makes 12 servings (2 egg halves). Per serving: 130 calories, 10 grams total fat (0 grams trans-fat), 185 milligrams cholesterol, 4 grams carbohydrates, 7 grams protein, 2 grams dietary fiber, 120 milligrams sodium, 1 gram sugar, 0 grams added sugar.

**References:**

1. National Cancer Institute – *Artificial Sweeteners and Cancer*; Aug. 10, 2016
2. American Heart Association – [heart.org](http://heart.org)
3. Recipe found at [aicc.org/cancer-prevention/recipes/avocado-deviled-eggs/](http://aicc.org/cancer-prevention/recipes/avocado-deviled-eggs/)

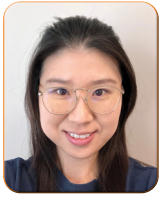
Note: Fresh eggs are more difficult to peel; to make it easy, buy your eggs one to two weeks before you plan to make this recipe, if possible.

**Directions:**

1. Hard boil eggs by placing eggs in an even layer in a large pot covered by two inches of cold water. Heat pan on high and bring to a rolling boil, immediately turn off heat, cover pot with lid and let eggs sit on hot burner for 10 minutes.
2. Transfer eggs to bowl of ice water to cool. Peel eggs.
3. Slice eggs lengthwise and scoop out yolks. Place yolks in a large mixing bowl.
4. Add avocados to yolks and mash with folk until completely mixed.
5. Add remaining ingredients, except paprika, and stir to combine.
6. Carefully scoop about one tablespoon of mixture into each egg white half.
7. Sprinkle with paprika to garnish.
8. Top with jalapeno, if desired.



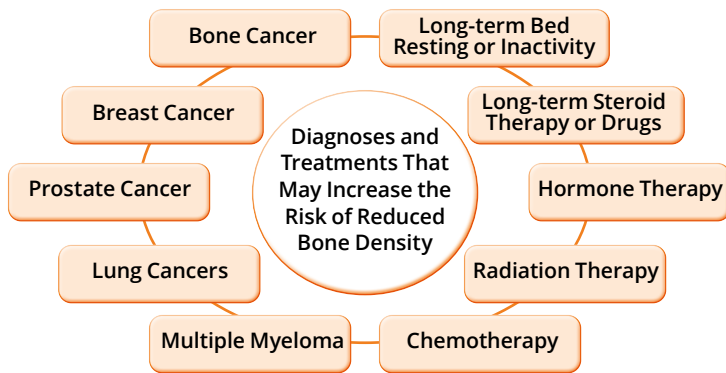
Photo By: Sonja Goedkoop MSPH, RD



## How to Increase Bone Health and Lower the Risk of Fracture

By: Yinghua Zhang, PT, DPT

When thinking of exercising, chances are that the first thoughts may be the benefits to the heart and lungs. While exercise does wonderful things for both the heart and lungs, it is also an important part of bone health. Survivors and patients face an increased risk of fractures (breaks) and losing bone density due to both the direct effects of cancer on the skeleton and the potential side effects that come with some cancer therapies (see below).



There are several ways to improve bone health and reduce the risk of fracture. Here are a few tips that can combat against bone loss and promote strong, healthy bones before, during and after treatment. In addition to taking bone-modifying medications, eating a healthy diet and taking calcium and vitamin D supplements, bone health can be improved through exercises, such as weight-bearing physical activity and resistance training. While weight-bearing activities and resistance training may sound intimidating, the exercises can be simple and work against gravity. This triggers the body to make new cells that form bone and strengthen muscles, which in turn provides stability and overall good health.



### Activities that improve bone health:

- Walking
- Dancing
- Stair climbing
- Squatting
- Tai Chi or check out the [stress reduction classes offered by Cancer Support Community Atlanta](#)
- Resistance training exercises with elastic band or low weights
- Water aerobics
- Resistance training using home objects like a food can or water bottle as a light weight

Below is an example of a daily routine that incorporates simple, low to moderate intensity weight-bearing and resistance training exercises.

**Morning:**

- Walk (indoors or outdoors) at a comfortable pace for 10 minutes
- Take a brief rest break
- Complete first set of 10-15 repetitions of low to moderate intensity exercises\*

**Afternoon:**

- Climb stairs for one to three flights at a comfortable pace
- Take a brief rest break
- Complete second set of 10-15 repetitions of low to moderate intensity exercises\*

**Evening:**

- Try dancing, Tai Chi or a Cancer Support Community Gentle Exercise virtual class for 10 minutes
- Take a brief rest break
- Complete final set of 10-15 repetitions of low to moderate intensity exercises\*

\*Perform an upper body resistive exercise on your first day of exercise and alternate to a lower body resistive exercise on your next workout.

Ask a health care professional about how to perform exercises safely, especially if you have any concerns about your balance or other medical conditions. Northside Hospital Rehabilitation Services is here to support you in your cancer journey and survivorship. Call [404.236.8030](tel:404.236.8030) to schedule an appointment with a therapist and learn more about how physical activity can improve your bone health.

It is never too late to improve your bone health!

**Remember:** Regular weight bearing and resistance training exercises, 30 minutes per day, three to five days per week (goal of 150 minutes per week) will build strong muscles, increase energy levels and improve balance to prevent falls and fractures. Additionally, even brief intervals of weight-bearing activity during periods of limited mobility or bed rest can help lessen bone loss. Every little bit helps!



## STORIES OF HOPE & HEALING\*

### Survivor Story: Meet Keith



#### What are the events that led up to your cancer diagnosis?

In 2018, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I had my prostate removed and was told that it was a complete success. Shortly thereafter,

during a routine follow-up, high levels of protein were identified in my bloodwork. As a result, I was sent to a hematologist for further review and was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a treatable, but not curable, disease.

#### What treatment did you receive?

I was fortunate to be sent to Dr. Padma Nadella, an excellent hematologist at Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic. I received RVD treatment, a three-drug regimen that includes lenalidomide (Revlimid®), bortezomib (Velcade®), and dexamethasone for about three months. Following that treatment, I was sent to Dr. Melhem Solh of The Blood & Marrow Transplant Group of Georgia (BMTGA) to ensure that I was a candidate for a stem cell transplant. Luckily, I was a viable candidate. My stem cell transplant was successful and included an eight-week period of treatment recovery. I graduated from BMTGA in November of 2019 and have felt great ever since!

#### How and where did you receive support during your treatment and recovery?

My wife, Susan, has been amazing during the entire journey! She was my sole caregiver, and I feel extremely fortunate to have her by my side. Also, I have to say that everyone on the care teams at both Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic and Northside Hospital Cancer Institute were amazing and helpful! They are the best of the best in my opinion!

#### What advice do you have for someone navigating their treatment and recovery journey?

I would suggest that they follow the nine-point plan I developed called “Living Well With Cancer” (see next column). I have followed this plan faithfully, and as a result, I feel healthier than ever. Of the nine steps, I would say that step three, following your doctor’s instructions to the letter regarding your prescriptions is the most important.

#### Living Well With Cancer: My Nine Step Plan

1. Get the best medical care possible (get a second or third opinion if necessary). You owe it to yourself, your family and friends to get the best care possible!
2. Surround yourself with family and friends who will help (and provide a support system) when necessary.
3. Follow your doctor’s instructions to the letter regarding your prescriptions.
4. Get proper nutrition—I eat lots of fruit and vegetables with every meal.
5. Get lots of exercise—walking is great.
6. Vitamins—I take 5 different types every day.
7. Hydrate, hydrate and then hydrate some more! Medical experts say you should drink 64 ounces of a clear liquid like water (but not vodka!) per day!
8. Sleep—get some! Again, experts recommend 6-8 hours per night. I shut off my phone and all other electronic devices an hour before bedtime. I then take a long hot shower, shut off all the lights and am off to la-la-land until morning!
9. Cultivate and maintain a positive mental attitude. I have a very dear friend who is a retired cardiologist, and he says that my positive attitude has been instrumental in my beating cancer twice recently.

#### How far out are you from treatment or is treatment ongoing?

I have been in remission since February of 2020 and continue maintenance treatment. Once in remission, I realized I wanted to give back in some way and help others navigating their own cancer journeys. In March of 2020, I was selected as a Myeloma Coach by the [HealthTree Foundation](#) and have enjoyed every minute of it.



#### Closing Thoughts

Keep moving forward! You must be relentless, resilient and persistent! I feel healthier (both mentally and physically!) at 69 than at any time since I stopped playing hockey at age 28. Now I am so happy! I have my new friends and my new life. I am even breathing differently. I actually experienced cancer, surgery, radiation and chemo for over a year and have not missed a beat. I do not really think about it; all I think about is living.

\*Patients' stories are based on individual experiences. The process from diagnosis through treatment may vary as well as symptoms, side effects and provider recommendations.



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT & RESOURCES



### A Wellness Place Helps Patients Recover Comfortably and Survivors Maintain Dignity

By: Beth Allen, RN, IBCLC

A Wellness Place is an outpatient department of Northside Hospital that offers a wide variety of mastectomy products and compression garments. During a time when patients may be feeling vulnerable due to physical and emotional changes, A Wellness Place can take the “guess work” out of finding quality products. We offer the support and services to allow survivors and patients to recover comfortably, regain their confidence and maintain their dignity.

Women who experience a mastectomy can be fit with a post-operative camisole (complete with pockets for drains) in the surgical recovery area. After healing from surgery, our specially trained and certified staff can provide a one-on-one, private consultation to help determine which products are the best option. Additionally, with the appropriate physician order, reorders can be set up for direct home delivery. Specifically for survivors, A Wellness Place carries a full range of breast prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimsuits.

Our certified fitters work in collaboration with physicians to help reduce the swelling patients may

experience and maintain their active lifestyles. Compression garments are utilized in the treatment of vascular diseases, lymphedema, removal of lymph nodes and other post-surgical procedures. They are designed to promote circulation, prevent or contain swelling and fluid accumulation and are available in a range of gradient pressures and styles. Most of our garments are dispensed with a physician’s order and are medical grade, so they are as effective as possible. We pride ourselves on having top-of-the-line garments in a variety of fabrics, patterns and colors to fit each individual’s lifestyle.

At A Wellness Place, our aim is to connect survivors and patients to resources that will help make life with cancer and lymphedema or vascular disease a little more comfortable.

For more information, please call any of our locations:  
 A Wellness Place at Northside Atlanta [404.845.5125](tel:404.845.5125)  
 A Wellness Place at Northside Forsyth [770.292.2029](tel:770.292.2029)  
 A Wellness Place at Northside Cherokee [770.721.9560](tel:770.721.9560)

A Wellness  
Place

at NORTHSIDE



## GET INVOLVED

### White Ribbon Project Aims to Spread Lung Cancer Awareness



The [White Ribbon Project](#) (founded by lung cancer survivor Heidi Nafman Onda in October of 2020) is an initiative that was started to spread awareness and education regarding lung cancer to the medical community. A patient or survivor ambassador is identified to meet with the hospital on a regular basis to discuss plans for advocacy and awareness.

At Northside Hospital, Bill Westlake (previously featured in our Survivor Stories) serves as ambassador and presented Iona Bonta, MD and Venkatesh Lakshminarayanan, MD with their very own white ribbons in June of this year.

#### Upcoming Cancer Awareness Months

**October:** Breast Cancer and Liver Cancer

**November:** Lung Cancer, Pancreatic Cancer, Stomach Cancer, Carcinoid Cancer, Honoring Caregivers



## EVENTS & CANCER CELEBRATIONS

### Atlanta Multiple Myeloma Symposium (AMMS)

March 5, 2022, from 1:30-4:15 p.m. @ the InterContinental  
The afternoon program is geared toward patients and includes a presentation from this month's featured survivor, Keith Guernsey. **SAVE THE DATE!**



## CANCER SCREENING & PREVENTION

### Skin Cancer Screening

October 14, 2021, from 6-8 p.m. @ Northside Hospital Cancer Institute Radiation Oncology – Atlanta

### Built to Quit- Smoking and Tobacco Cessation Course

Next 6-week session start dates: November 9, 2021 & January 4, 2022

Classes are currently web-based and meet weekly.

They are conducted primarily in a group setting, which encourages participants to learn from each other.



## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### 2021 Atlanta Walk to End Colon Cancer

October 23, 2021, from 8-11 a.m. @ the Historic Fourth Ward Park



### Lungevity Foundation Breathe Deep Together Virtual Walk & Run-5K

November 6, 2021 @ 10 a.m.



### American Lung Association Lung Force 5K

December 4, 2021 @ 8 a.m. @ Jim R. Miller Park, Marietta



## RELAY FOR LIFE

### RFL of Forsyth County

October 22, 2021, from 6-11 p.m. @ Cumming Fairgrounds



## NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL EVENTS

### Tennis Against Breast Cancer Benefiting Northside Hospital's Breast Care Program

October 15, 2021 in North Fulton

October 22, 2021 in Gwinnett



### Paint Gwinnett Pink 5K Walk/Run for Breast Cancer - Virtual

October 23, 2021



Click [here](#) to sign up to receive the Survivorship Newsletter in your inbox.