

# Healthy Living Newsletter

A MedWatch publication to keep you healthy and informed.

## Staying Healthy in the Fall



## October is Physical Therapy Awareness Month

October is National Physical Therapy Month — a time to recognize the invaluable role that physical therapy plays in improving the lives of individuals with various health conditions. Physical therapists (PTs) apply their practice in every healthcare setting imaginable — hospitals, nursing homes, home care, schools, outpatient clinics, surgery centers, and telehealth. Physical therapy is a crucial area of healthcare in our society. PTs advocate for wellness, prevent disease and injury, and solve problems to help patients move better without pain.

**What is Physical Therapy?** Physical therapy is a dynamic and evidence-based profession that helps to improve or restore mobility, relieve pain, and reduce the need for surgery and prescription drugs. Physical therapy professionals diagnose and treat individuals of all ages with medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to perform functional activities in their daily lives. Physical therapy also prevents the loss of mobility before it occurs through fitness and wellness-oriented programs that result in healthier and more active lifestyles.

**What is a Physical Therapist?** Physical therapists are experts in human movement and the musculoskeletal system. They diagnose and treat individuals of all ages and abilities, improving quality of life through hands-on care, patient education, and prescribed exercise. Physical therapists primarily work with individuals recovering from an injury or surgical procedure but also care for people who want to become healthier and prevent future issues. They offer cost-effective care that improves mobility and relieves pain. This reduces the need for surgery and opioid prescription drugs, enabling patients to take an active role in a recovery plan tailored to their needs and goals.

**Are There Different Types of Physical Therapy?** Physical therapy offers a wide range of subspecialties to meet various needs. Here are the more prevalent types of physical therapy:

- **Cardiovascular and Pulmonary PT:** This form of physical therapy features rehabilitation programs for people with heart conditions (such as heart attacks and angina) or lung diseases (such as asthma and COPD).
- **Orthopedic PT:** The purpose of orthopedic physical therapy is to help you recover from injuries, such as breaking a bone, getting hurt while playing sports, or after surgery.
- **Pediatric PT:** A physical therapist specializing in pediatric physical therapy works with infants and children to help them overcome medical conditions or injuries that can interfere with normal development.
- **Sports PT:** This discipline of physical therapy focuses on helping athletes recover from injuries and achieve top performance.

- **Decongestive PT:** Often called complete decongestive therapy (CDT), this form of therapy treats a condition called lymphedema, which is damage to the lymph nodes often caused by some cancer treatments.
- **Geriatric PT:** Some physical therapists specialize in working with older women and men to treat age-related problems with movement and function.

- **Neurological PT:** People who have had strokes or brain injuries, or have neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis, may benefit from neurological PT.

- **Vestibular and Balance Therapy:** If you experience frequent dizziness or poor balance, your doctor may recommend vestibular and balance therapy.
- **Wound Care Therapy:** If you have a wound (after surgery, for example), a physical therapist can help ensure that it heals well and that you recover normal movement.

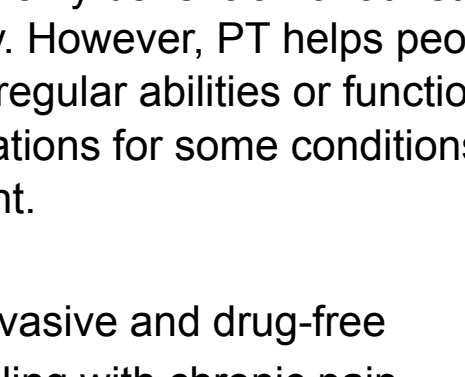
**What are the Risks of Physical Therapy?** Physical therapy is very safe and effective. Like any physical activity, you'll have a small injury risk — including aggravating an existing injury. Talk to your physical therapist about how to do all your exercises and movements safely, especially if you're doing physical therapy at home without supervision between appointments.

**Is Physical Therapy Worth it?** It might not be easy (especially at first), but physical therapy is definitely worth it. You might feel stressed, sore, or tired after a physical therapy session, but your strength, flexibility, and mobility will improve over time. Your physical therapist will help you set realistic goals and expectations.

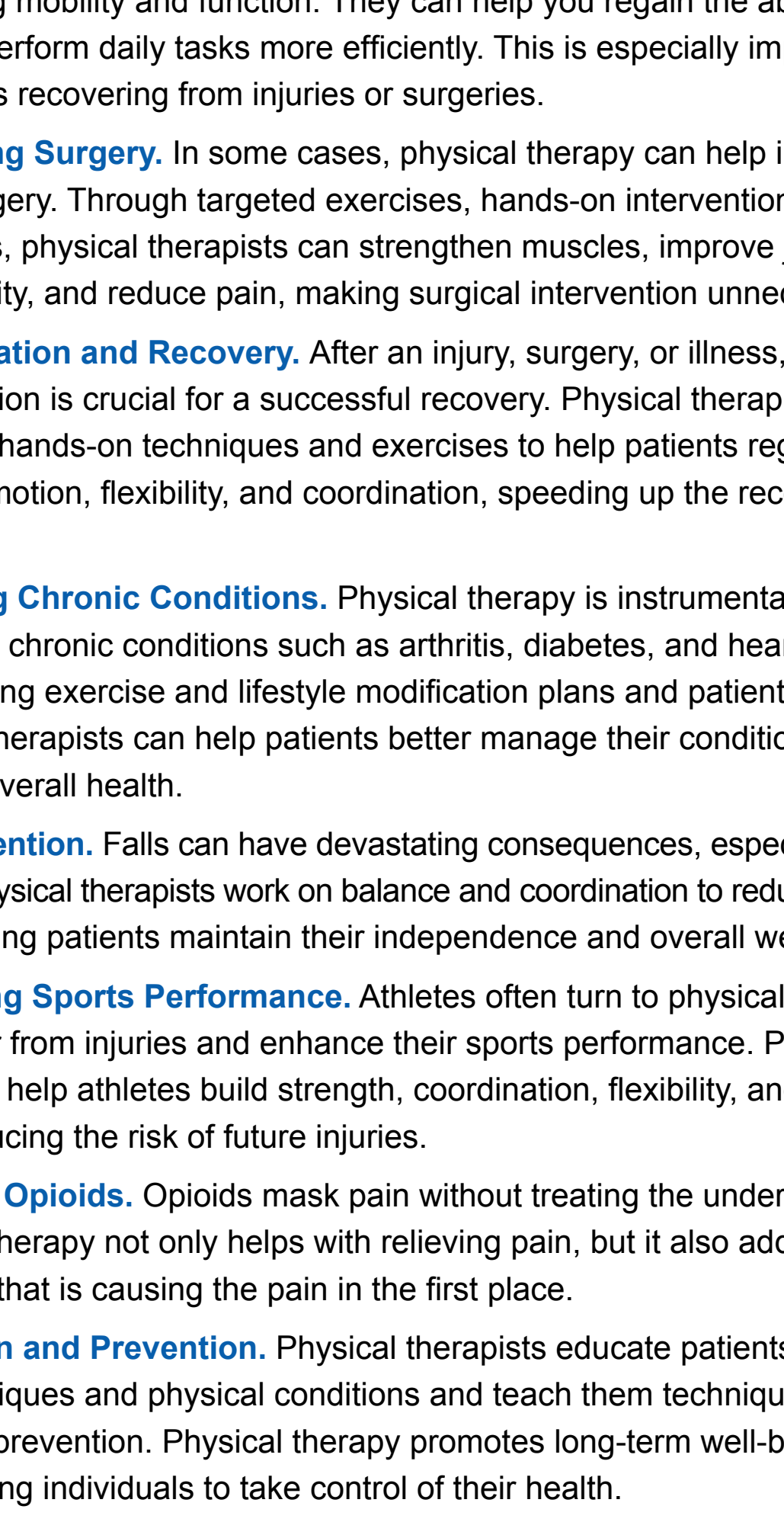
In the United States, all states allow some form of direct access to physical therapy, meaning patients can seek physical therapy services **without a physician's referral. However, the extent of this access varies by state and can be categorized into three types:**

1. **Unrestricted Direct Access:** Patients can be evaluated and treated by a licensed physical therapist without any physician referral or monitoring.
2. **Provisioned Direct Access:** Therapists can perform evaluations and begin treatments, but there may be restrictions on the number of visits or types of treatments available.
3. **Restricted Direct Access:** [Therapists can perform initial evaluations, but a physician's approval is required before treatment can start.](#)

## Levels of Patient Access to Physical Therapist Services in the US



Although all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands enjoy a form of direct access to physical therapist services, provisions and limitations vary among jurisdictions. This map and the key below identify each jurisdiction's level of direct access. (Starting on Page 2 is a summary of the language (if any) in each state's practice act related to direct access. (Data current as of February 2021.)



### Limited Patient Access (3 States)

Access to evaluation, fitness, and wellness and limited treatment only to certain patient populations or under certain circumstances (e.g., treatment restricted to patients with a previous medical diagnosis or subject of a previous physician referral).

*Alabama, Missouri, Mississippi*

### Patient Access With Provisions (27 States, Washington, D.C., U.S. Virgin Islands)

Access to evaluation and treatment with some provisions such as a time or visit limit, or referral requirement for a specific treatment intervention such as needle EMG or spinal manipulation.

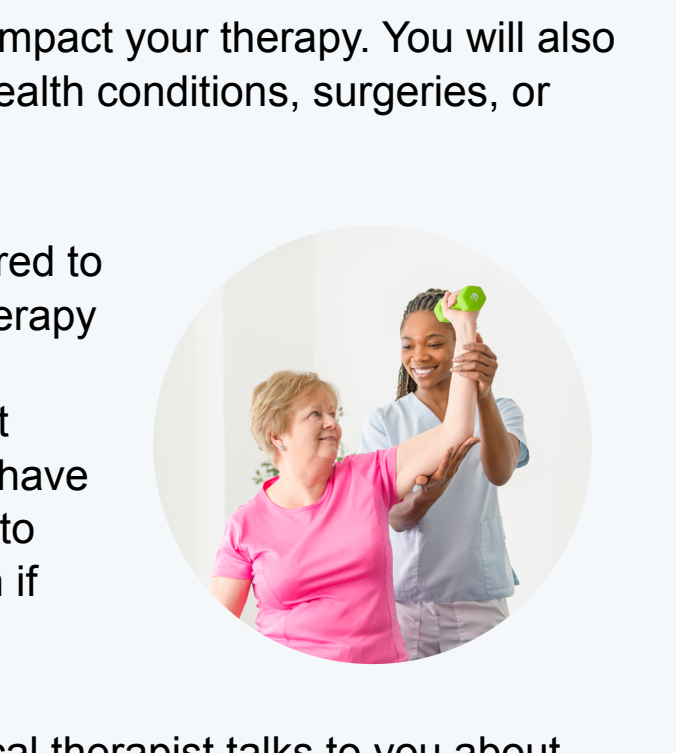
*Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, Washington, Washington, D.C., Wisconsin*

### Unrestricted Patient Access (20 States)

No restrictions or limitations whatsoever for treatment absent a referral.

*Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia*

## The Many Benefits of Physical Therapy

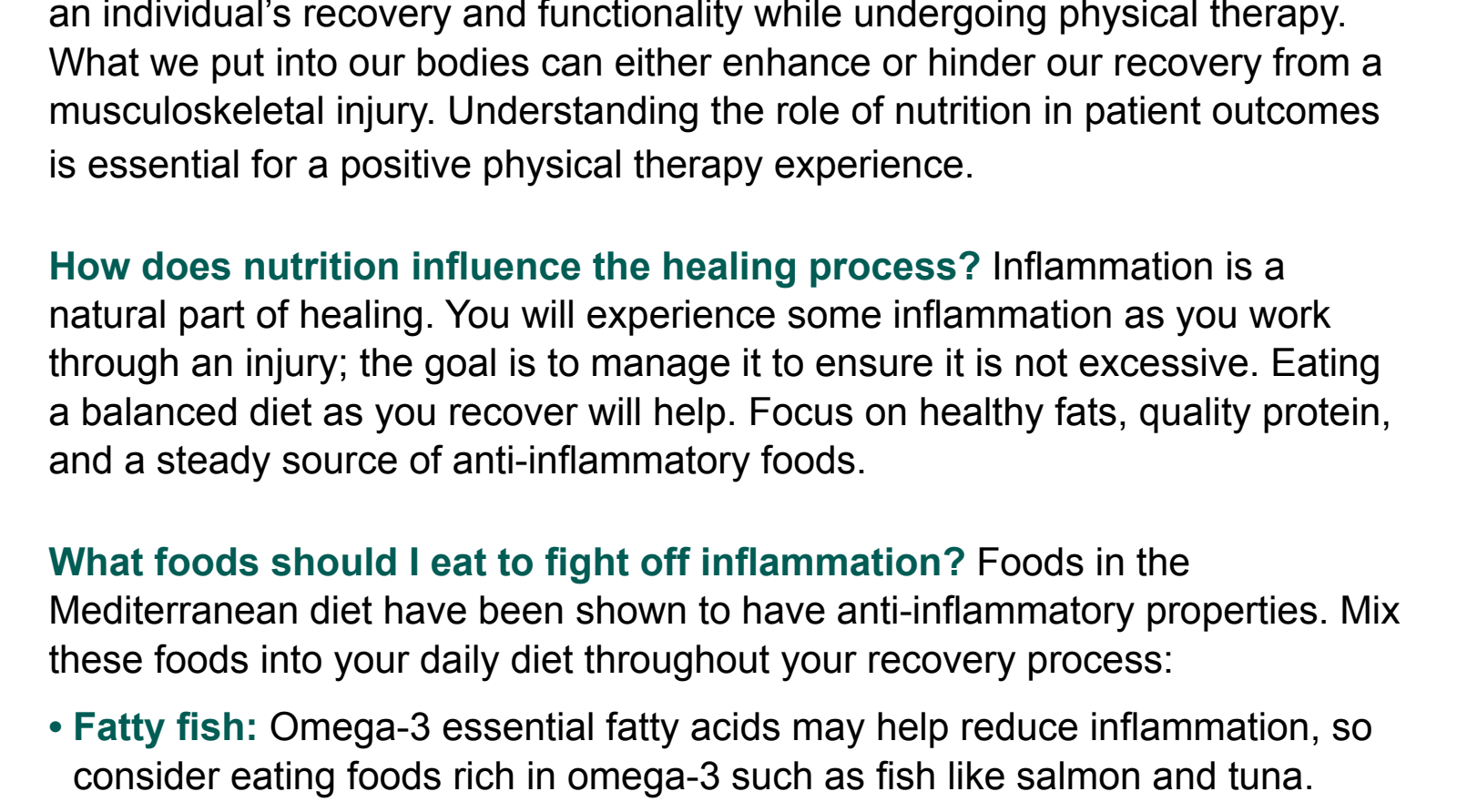


Some people believe that physical therapy (PT) is only beneficial for athletes or people recovering from surgery or severe injury. However, PT helps people with medical or physical conditions that limit their regular abilities or functions. It can be an alternative treatment option to medications for some conditions. PT can lower patient treatment costs by 72 percent.

- **Pain Management.** Physical therapy is a non-invasive and drug-free approach to managing pain. Whether you're dealing with chronic pain conditions, post-surgical discomfort, or sports injuries, physical therapists can develop personalized treatment plans to alleviate pain and improve your overall quality of life.
- **Improved Mobility and Function.** Physical therapists are experts in enhancing mobility and function. They can help you regain the ability to move, walk, or perform daily tasks more efficiently. This is especially important for individuals recovering from injuries or surgeries.
- **Preventing Surgery.** In some cases, physical therapy can help individuals avoid surgery. Through targeted exercises, hands-on interventions, and using modalities, physical therapists can strengthen muscles, improve joint mobility and stability, and reduce pain, making surgical intervention unnecessary.
- **Rehabilitation and Recovery.** After an injury, surgery, or illness, rehabilitation is crucial for a successful recovery. Physical therapists use a variety of hands-on techniques and exercises to help patients regain strength, range of motion, flexibility, and coordination, speeding up the recovery process.
- **Managing Chronic Conditions.** Physical therapy is instrumental in managing chronic conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, and heart disease. By providing exercise and lifestyle modification plans and patient education, physical therapists can help patients better manage their conditions and improve overall health.
- **Fall Prevention.** Falls can have devastating consequences, especially for older adults. Physical therapists work on balance and coordination to reduce the risk of falls, helping patients maintain their independence and overall well-being.
- **Enhancing Sports Performance.** Athletes often turn to physical therapy to recover from injuries and enhance their sports performance. Physical therapists help athletes build strength, coordination, flexibility, and endurance while reducing the risk of future injuries.
- **Avoiding Opioids.** Opioids mask pain without treating the underlying cause. Physical therapy not only helps with relieving pain, but it also addresses the condition that is causing the pain in the first place.
- **Education and Prevention.** Physical therapists educate patients about their physiques and physical conditions and teach them techniques for self-care and prevention. Physical therapy promotes long-term well-being by empowering individuals to take control of their health.

If you think that you could benefit from physical therapy, [consult your doctor or contact your Pathways Concierge team at the number listed on the back of your health plan ID card.](#)

Source: [Lifeline Physical Therapy](#)



## What to Expect at Physical Therapy – Preparing for Your First Session

While treatment will differ from person to person, some basics apply to everyone when starting physical therapy. Here's some information to help you get the most out of your PT experience.

**Gather Information Needed by Your Therapist.** When preparing for your initial physical therapy appointment, be sure to write down the important facts about the history of your problem, such as:

- When and how did your problem begin?
- How well did you do daily activities like stair climbing or lifting groceries before your injury?
- How often do the symptoms recur?
- How is that problem changing?
- What makes things better or worse?

Bring a list of your medications as these may impact your therapy. You will also need to tell your therapist about any chronic health conditions, surgeries, or procedures you have had.

**What to Wear to Physical Therapy** Be prepared to move around a lot during your first physical therapy session. With that in mind, wear comfortable, flexible clothing that allows for easy movement and access to your injury. For example, if you have shoulder pain, wear a shirt that allows access to your shoulder and arm. Shorts should be worn if you have hip, knee, or ankle pain.



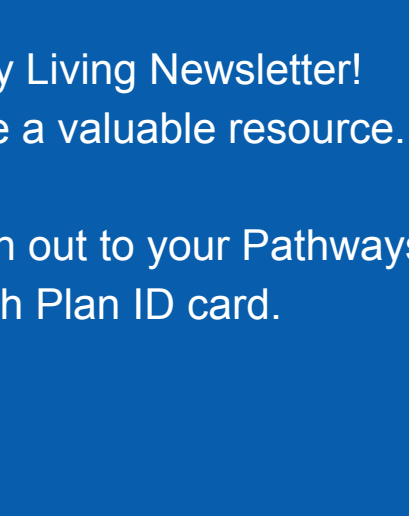
**Your Initial PT Examination.** After your physical therapist talks to you about your condition, you'll have an examination. Your physical therapist will assess impairments that may be causing your problem or that may be affected by your injury. Common measurements taken during a physical therapy examination include testing range of motion, strength, functional mobility, balance, and neurological screening. During the exam, your physical therapist should give you a sense of what may be helping or hurting your situation.

**Setting Up a Treatment Plan.** After your exam, your therapist will create a treatment plan to decrease your pain and improve your mobility. You will find out the goals of treatment and the expected course of your rehab. Your physical therapist may start treatment immediately after your initial evaluation or at your next appointment. After your initial evaluation, your physical therapist should prescribe specific exercises to do on your own and provide you with a detailed printout on how to do them that you can reference at home.

**How Often Will You See Your Therapist?** The frequency of your visits to your therapist will vary based on factors such as your pain level and current level of mobility. Many rehab programs require you to come in two or three times a week, but some may only require a weekly visit. The best results happen when you stick with a prescribed treatment plan, undergo frequent sessions, and do home exercises between visits.

### Nutrition Corner

## How Nutrition Can Support The Healing Process



In the same way that athletes prioritize their diet for maximum performance, people recovering from a serious injury should consider the role of diet in their rehabilitation process. Research shows that nutrition directly affects an individual's recovery and functionality while undergoing physical therapy. What we put into our bodies can either enhance or hinder our recovery from a musculoskeletal injury. Understanding the role of nutrition in patient outcomes is essential for a positive physical therapy experience.

**How does nutrition influence the healing process?** Inflammation is a natural part of healing. You will experience some inflammation as you work through an injury; the goal is to manage it to ensure it is not excessive. Eating a balanced diet as you recover will help. Focus on healthy fats, quality protein, and a steady source of anti-inflammatory foods.

**What foods should I eat to fight off inflammation?** Foods in the Mediterranean diet have been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties. Mix these foods into your daily diet throughout your recovery process:

- **Fatty fish:** Omega-3 essential fatty acids may help reduce inflammation, so consider eating foods rich in omega-3 such as fish like salmon and tuna.
- **Green leafy veggies:** Spinach, kale, and collard greens are high in beta-carotene, which has been shown to decrease inflammatory markers.
- **Nuts:** Nuts like almonds, walnuts, and flaxseeds contain magnesium, l-arginine, omega-3 and vitamin E, which may help keep inflammation under control.
- **Olive oil:** Oleocanthal and oleic acid in olive oil may reduce levels of inflammatory markers.
- **Berries:** Flavonoids in berries like blueberries, strawberries, and raspberries have anti-inflammatory properties.

While some foods are anti-inflammatory, others may promote inflammation in your body. Foods to avoid while recovering include fried and ultra-processed foods. Limit red meats and foods high in sodium, sugar, and saturated fats.

### What should I eat before physical therapy?

Before a PT session, you should consider a light snack that combines protein and a healthy carbohydrate. Try a banana or apple slices with a scoop of almond or peanut butter, or whole grain toast with a slice of hard-boiled egg on top.

### What should I eat after physical therapy?

Supporting muscle mass means eating an adequate amount of protein, which helps heal muscle and repair tissue. A plate of grilled chicken, fish, or tofu with brown rice and broccoli on the side after a PT session is one meal idea. You could also have Greek yogurt with diced orange mixed in to get vitamin C. Eggs are a versatile, post-PT meal choice because they're filled with protein and essential vitamins and minerals. Try chopping up some veggies and cooking them into an egg-white omelet.

Also, don't forget to hydrate during all phases of the PT process. Drink water before, after, and during the rest periods of your PT session. Avoid sweetened beverages like soda and juice.

Source: [Blue Cross Blue Shield](#)



## Did You Know? Fun Facts About Physical Therapy

- **The roots of the physical therapy profession began thousands of years ago.** The Greek philosopher, Hippocrates, began using techniques that birthed physical therapy in 435 B.C.
- **The profession got its start in WW1.** Reconstruction aids, or nurses, provided therapy treatment to help soldiers returning from battle.
- **Physical therapy is a female-dominant field,** making up just under 70 percent of the physical therapist workforce.
- **Physical therapy can save you money.** [A recent study](#) found that patients with lower back pain who started treatment with PT saved an average of 72 percent in the first year, compared to those who chose surgery for relief.
- **PTs have advanced degrees.** Since 2015, anyone pursuing a career in physical therapy in the U.S. requires a doctoral degree.
- **Physical therapy ranks among the top 10 “happiest jobs.”** Forbes based this finding on median salary, job flexibility, projected job growth, and the ability to provide direct care to those in need.
- **Telehealth physical therapy is now an option.** Patients can now receive virtual consultations and guidance from physical therapists in the comfort of their own homes.
- **Physical therapy isn't always painful.** While you may experience some discomfort as you work to regain strength and mobility, physical therapists are skilled at ensuring that treatments are as pain-free as possible.

Thank you for subscribing to MedWatch's Healthy Living Newsletter! We hope you enjoyed the content and found it to be a valuable resource.

For more information and additional resources, reach out to your Pathways Concierge team at the number on your Health Plan ID card.