

Physical Therapy: All the Right Moves

After an illness or injury, you may need help to return to your former activity level. Physical therapy can help get you back on your feet.

By Louis Neipris, MD, Staff Writer

Are you recovering from an injury or dealing with an illness or disability? If so, physical therapy may be able to help.

Physical therapy is considered a conservative approach to healing. It's not invasive, like surgery or other treatments. A physical therapist uses exercises and hands-on methods, like massage, to improve strength and movement. Physical therapy may be used along with or instead of surgery or other treatments.

Physical therapy may help you:

- Move more easily and increase your range of motion
- Have less pain
- Regain lost functioning
- Avoid or limit disability
- Achieve a more fit and healthy lifestyle

When is physical therapy recommended?

Doctors often prescribe physical therapy after surgery or for injuries such as a torn rotator cuff or a knee sprain. It can help you manage back or joint pain, or strengthen muscles weakened by injury or disease. If you've had a stroke or heart attack, physical therapy might be a part of your treatment plan.

Physical therapists have specialized education and training in the muscle, nerves, bones, and joints as well as in heart and lung function. They do more than help people with illness and injuries. PTs often consult in work settings to help prevent job-related injuries and illnesses. They also help athletes and others reach and maintain their peak performances.

What happens in physical therapy?

After an initial exam, a physical therapist designs a treatment plan for your needs. This may combine exercises, stretches, and balance and coordination activities to help get you moving. A physical therapist may use heat, ice, water, electrical stimulation, massage, and ultrasound (sound waves that produce heat) to ease pain, reduce swelling, and improve circulation.

Physical therapists can also help you learn how to use assistive devices such as crutches and wheelchairs or adapt to the use of a prosthesis.

Is physical therapy covered by insurance?

Many insurance companies will pay for physical therapy if you have a doctor's referral for your illness or injury. Most policies don't cover physical therapy services to improve athletic performance or reach fitness goals that aren't related to illness or injury. There may also be a time limit for covering these services. In some states, you will need a referral before you can see a physical therapist.

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