

WHAT IS PHYSICAL THERAPY

It is likely that you have heard of physical therapy, or you may know someone who has been treated by a physical therapist for some type of injury or condition. But exactly what is physical therapy? Who are physical therapists? The Model Definition of Physical Therapy adopted by the American Physical Therapy Association, states that physical therapy includes:

- Examining individuals with impairment, functional limitation, and disability or other health related conditions in order to determine a diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention.
- Alleviating impairment and functional limitation by designing, implementing, and modifying therapeutic interventions.
- Preventing injury, impairment, functional limitation, and disability, including the promotion and maintenance of fitness, health, and quality of life in people of all ages.
- Engaging in consultation, education, and research.

Physical therapist provides health care services to patients of all ages and health conditions. It serves infants with birth defects to aid motor development and functional abilities; people with burns and wounds to prevent abnormal scarring and loss of movement; survivors of strokes to regain movement, function, and independent living; patients with cancer to regain strength and relieve discomfort; patients with low back problems to reduce pain and restore function; and patients with cardiac involvement to improve endurance and achieve independence. Physical therapy also provides for preventive exercise programs and programs that promote general health and fitness, postural improvement, and industrial safety and health.

The scope of physical therapy practice extends beyond the generic definition and so therefore do its practitioners. Physical Therapist is not a generic term. A Physical Therapist is specially trained in examination and treatment of musculoskeletal and neuromuscular problems that affect ones abilities to move and function as well as they can in their daily lives. Because physical therapists are required to understand a vast array of problems that affect movement, function, and health, all physical therapists are college graduates. Currently all physical therapist education programs are at a master's degree level, with many schools offering a clinical doctorate in physical therapy. All physical therapists must pass the national examination and be licensed by the state in which they practice. Some physical therapists also seek advanced certification in clinical specialty, such as orthopaedic, neurologic, cardiovascular and pulmonary, pediatric, geriatric, sports physical therapy, or electrophysiological testing and measurement.

What to expect as a patient from your Physical Therapist;

- Examination to include performing tests and measures.
- Perform evaluations by making clinical judgments based on the data gathered during the examination.
- Establish a diagnosis by organizing evaluation results into defined clusters, syndromes, or categories to help determine appropriate intervention strategies.
- Determine a prognosis that indicates the level of optimum improvement that might be attained.
- Provide interventions based on the outcomes desired.
- Evaluate the success of those interventions and modify treatment as may be necessary to effect the desired outcome.
- Terminate interventions when benefit has been attained.
- Provide prevention and wellness (including health promotion) programs.
- Provide services to consult, screen, and educate.

As one can see, physical therapists do not confine their training and talents to treating people who are only ill. A large part of a physical therapist's programs are directed at preventing injury and loss of movement. Physical therapists commonly work as consultants for industries to improve workplace design and reduce the risk of such things as muscle overuse or developing low back pain. They also provide services to athletes, at all levels by screening for potential problems and institute preventive exercise programs. With the boom in the fitness industry, some physical therapists consult with individuals and

fitness clubs to develop workouts that are safe and effective, especially for people who already know that they have a problem with their joints or their backs.

For further information or questions, please contact your local physical therapist on how physical therapy may benefit you.