

15 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PHYSICAL THERAPY

CORE PHYSICAL THERAPY & SPORTS
PERFORMANCE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PHYSICAL THERAPY

1. CAN I CHOOSE WHAT PHYSICAL THERAPIST I GO TO?

Absolutely! The decision of where you receive treatment is yours. If you have a specific therapist or practice you would like to go to, you should let your doctor or insurance company know this. Not all physical therapists or practices are the same and the choice of your provider is yours. Sometimes your physician will recommend a specific therapist or practice to you; sometimes your insurance company will require you to go to specific therapists or practice. You always have the right to ask for a specific provider. If we are not "in network" with your specific insurance company, many have out of network options that still provide coverage with no cost to you.

2. WHY IS PHYSICAL THERAPY A GOOD CHOICE?

More than half of all Americans are suffering from pain. However, many do not even know that physical therapists are well equipped to not only treat pain but also find the source of the pain.


Physical therapists are experts at treating movement and neuro-musculoskeletal disorders. Pain often accompanies a movement disorder, and physical therapists can help correct the disorder and relieve the pain.

3. WHAT DO PHYSICAL THERAPISTS DO?

You have probably heard of the profession of physical therapy. Maybe you have had a conversation with a friend about how physical therapy helped get rid of his or her back pain, or you might know someone who needed physical therapy after an injury. You might even have been treated by a physical therapist yourself. But have you ever wondered about physical therapists--who they are and what they do? Many people are familiar with physical therapists' work helping patients with orthopedic problems, such as low back pain or knee surgeries, to reduce pain and regain function. Others may be aware of the treatment that physical therapists provide to assist patients recovering from a stroke (e.g., assisting them with recovering use of their limbs and walking again).

The ability to maintain an upright posture and to move your arms and legs to perform all sorts of tasks and activities is an important component of your health. Most of us can learn to live with the various medical conditions that we may develop, but only if we are able to continue at our jobs, take care of our families, and enjoy important occasions with family and friends. All of these activities require the ability to move without difficulty or pain.

Because physical therapists are experts in movement and function, they do not confine their talents to treating people who are ill. A large part of a physical therapist's program is directed at preventing injury, loss of movement, and even surgery. Physical therapists work as consultants in industrial settings to improve the design of the workplace and reduce the risk of workers overusing certain muscles or developing low back pain. They also provide services to athletes at all levels to screen for potential problems and institute preventive exercise programs. With the boom in the golf and fitness industries, a number of physical therapists are engaged in consulting with recreational golfers 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.



The cornerstones of physical therapy treatment are therapeutic exercise and functional training. In addition to "hands-on" care, physical therapists also educate patients to take care of themselves and to perform certain exercises on their own. Depending on the particular needs of a patient, physical therapists may also "mobilize" a joint (that is, perform certain types of movements at the end of your range of motion) or massage a muscle to promote proper movement and function. Physical therapists also use methods such as ultrasound (which uses high frequency waves to produce heat), hot packs, and ice. Although other kinds of practitioners will offer some of these treatments as "physical therapy," it's important for you to know that physical therapy can only be provided by qualified physical therapists or by physical therapist assistants, who must complete a 2-year education program and who work only under the direction and supervision of physical therapists.

Most forms of physical therapy treatment are covered by your insurance, but the coverage will vary with each plan. Most states do not legally require patients to see their physicians before seeing a physical therapist. Most of the time all you have to do is ask your doctor if physical therapy is right for you.

Reference: [APTA](#)

4. IS PHYSICAL THERAPY PAINFUL?

For many patients, one of the primary objectives is pain relief. This is frequently accomplished with hands-on techniques, modalities such as ultrasound, electrical stimulation, and/or heat or cold therapy. Movement often provides pain relief as well. Your physical therapist will provide you with the appropriate exercises not only for pain relief but to recover range of motion, strength, and endurance.

In some cases, physical therapy techniques can be painful. For example, recovering knee range of motion after total knee replacement or shoulder range of motion after shoulder surgery may be painful. Your physical therapist will utilize a variety of techniques to help maximize your treatment goals. It is important that you communicate the intensity, frequency, and duration of pain to your therapist. Without this information, it is difficult for the therapist to adjust your treatment plan.

5. IS MY PHYSICAL THERAPIST LICENSED?

Physical therapists (PTs) are licensed in their respective states. Physical therapists have graduated from an accredited post baccalaureate program and passed their state board examination. Depending on the university, the physical therapy program is either a masters or doctorate level degree.

6. WHAT TYPES OF INSURANCE DO YOU ACCEPT?

We accept all types of insurance, including Medicare, and work with most insurance carriers. If you have a compatible insurance plan, our highly trained front desk personnel will make the entire process as seamless as possible. We start by gathering your information and then make all the necessary phone calls for you. After we verify your benefits to assure that your visits will be covered, you'll be contacted to schedule an appointment.

7. WHO PAYS FOR THE TREATMENT?

In most cases, health insurance will cover your treatment. Please talk to our receptionist so we can help you clarify your insurance coverage.

8. HOW SHOULD I DRESS?

You should wear loose fitting clothing so you can expose the area that we will be evaluating and treating. For example, if you have a knee problem, it is best to wear shorts. For a shoulder problem, a tank top is a good choice, and for low back problems, wear a loose fitting shirt and pants, again so we can perform a thorough examination.

9. WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING WITH ME?

Make sure you bring your physical therapy referral (provided to you by your doctor **if required**) If your insurance is covering the cost of physical therapy, bring your insurance card. If you are covered by Workers' Compensation, bring your claim number and your case manager's contact information. If you are covered by auto insurance or an attorney lien, make sure you bring this information.

Did you know that most states, including New Jersey, no longer require a doctor's prescription for physical / occupational therapy? This is called "*Direct Access*", which means you can schedule a physical or occupational therapy appointment without visiting your doctor, which saves you time and out-of-pocket medical expenses. In fact, most insurance plans now cover Direct Access services.

10. WHAT HAPPENS DURING MY FIRST VISIT?

During your first visit you can expect the following:

Arrive at your appointment with your paperwork completed (you can download it from our website - see the intake forms link) **OR** you can arrive 15 minutes early and complete it in our office.

You will provide us with your prescription for physical therapy (if required).

We will copy your insurance card.

You will be seen for the initial evaluation by the therapist.

The therapist will discuss the following:

- ▶ Your medical history.
- ▶ Your current problems/complaints.
- ▶ Pain intensity, what aggravates and eases the problem.
- ▶ How this is impacting your daily activities or your functional limitations.
- ▶ Your goals with physical therapy.
- ▶ Medications, tests, and procedures related to your health.

The therapist will then perform the objective evaluation which may include some of the following:

Palpation - touching around the area of the pain/problem. This is done to check for the presence of tenderness, swelling, soft tissue integrity, tissue temperature, inflammation, etc.

Range of Motion (ROM) - the therapist will move the joint(s) to check for the quality of movement and any restrictions.

Muscle Testing - the therapist may check for strength and the quality of the muscle contraction. Pain and weakness may be noted. Often the muscle strength is graded. This is also part of a neurological screening.

Neurological Screening - the therapist may check to see how the nerves are communicating with the muscles, sensing touch, pain, vibration, or temperature. Reflexes may be assessed as well.

Posture Assessment - the positions of joints relative to ideal and each other may be assessed.

The therapist will then formulate a list of problems you are having, and how to treat those problems. A plan is subsequently developed with the patient's input. This includes how many times you should see the therapist per week, how many weeks you will need therapy, home programs, patient education, short-term/long-term goals, and what is expected after discharge from therapy. This plan is created with input from you, your therapist, and your doctor.

11. HOW LONG WILL EACH TREATMENT LAST?

Treatment sessions typically last 45 to 60 minutes per visit.

12. HOW MANY VISITS WILL I NEED?

This is highly variable. You may need one visit or you may need months of care. It depends on your diagnosis, the severity of your impairments, your past medical history, etc. You will be re-evaluated on a monthly basis and when you see your doctor, we will provide you with a progress report with our recommendations.

13. HOW MANY TIMES A WEEK DO YOU USUALLY ATTEND PHYSICAL THERAPY?

Your treatment plan is dependent on what is found upon evaluation by the physical therapist. Treatment plans can vary from 1x/week to 3x/week but the typical frequency would be 2 – 3x/week for 45 minute sessions.

14. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY PROBLEM OR PAIN RETURNS?

Flare ups are not uncommon. If you have a flare up (exacerbation), give us a call. We may suggest you come back to see us, return to your doctor, or simply modify your daily activities or exercise routine.

15. WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO AFTER PHYSICAL THERAPY?

Some patients will need to continue with home exercises. Some may choose to continue with a gym exercise program. Others will complete their rehabilitation and return to normal daily activities. It is important that you communicate your goals to your therapist, so he/she can develop a custom program for you.

HOPEFULLY THESE TIPS GIVE YOU A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN MAKING YOUR DECISION REGARDING PHYSICAL THERAPY. HERE AT CORE PHYSICAL THERAPY & SPORTS PERFORMANCE WE LOOK FORWARD TO MAKING YOUR PHYSICAL THERAPY JOURNEY A PLEASANT ONE. OUR GOAL IS TO GET YOU BACK TO OPTIMAL HEALTH SO YOU CAN RETURN TO A PAIN FREE LIFE.