

5 Things You Need to Know About Physical Therapy

By Greg Specht, PT, OCS, ATC, CSCS

Many people have the misconception about physical therapy that treatments must be painful to be effective. Mention physical therapy and, unfortunately, horror stories abound. Ironically, one of the goals of physical therapy is the reduction of pain. Knowing what to expect during your visits to a physical therapist will hopefully dispel any apprehension you may feel. Here are five things to keep in mind to get the most out of your physical therapy program.

1. "No pain, no gain" does not work

Most people needing physical therapy have sustained an injury, been involved in an accident, or are suffering from some other disabling condition or disease, all of which cause discomfort of varying degrees.

Pain is the body's way of telling the brain that tissue damage is occurring. When you experience pain, your body's protective mechanisms take over, often inhibiting the strength and mobility of the damaged area. Frequently, people mistakenly believe their suffering has to get worse before it can get better; and this kind of thinking can cause a painful condition to worsen. Just remember, while temporary soreness can be a normal response to therapy sessions involving exercise and manual treatments, a correctly designed program should not make your injury or painful condition worse.

2. Your goals are top priority

Do you want your pain to go away?
To return to work?
To get back to your normal activities?
To prevent injury or improve sports performance?

You should discuss your goals in detail with your therapist so that appropriate treatment techniques will be developed and implemented. This should happen as early as you're first meeting. At that time, the therapist will also take your health history, observe your posture and movement, and evaluate problem areas. After discussing the results of the examination and your goals, the physical therapist will develop and, with your consent, implement a treatment plan. You should fully understand the purpose of the exercises and other treatment procedures, as well as the anticipated outcomes. Part of your treatment may involve exercising at home as well as at the therapist's office. To achieve your goals and to obtain maximum benefits from your therapy, it is important to follow through with your home treatment and exercise plan.

3. One-on-one treatment is best

Most people do not like seeing a different physical therapist each time they come in for an appointment and for good reason. One of the biggest factors in being successful in a rehabilitation program is related to having your own physical therapist. This is because modifying and progressing your treatment program during each treatment session will create the best results. In short, when you get to know your therapist and your therapist understands your needs and goals, you get better faster. High-quality physical therapy clinics are committed to this type of personalized, one-on-one treatment.

4. An integrated treatment approach is ideal

The best health care professionals recognize that a team approach will best address your needs. Physical therapists should collaborate with your medical doctor as well as other professionals involved in your care such as, chiropractors, massage therapists, nutritionists, acupuncturists, personal trainers, etc. Talk with your therapist about which complementary treatments will facilitate your healing and maximize your outcomes.

5. Lifelong health and fitness is the ultimate goal

Your physical therapist's job is to help you return to you normal (or as close to normal as possible) physical ability following injuries and other disabling conditions. Beyond helping you “get back to life”, physical therapists are skilled in designing exercise programs that fit any goals, including strength training, flexibility and cardiovascular conditioning programs for the home or gym. Other areas of expertise include sports performance enhancement, injury prevention, and posture and body mechanics education.

Your physical therapist is there not only to help you get back to life after an injury, but also to enable you to live the healthiest, fittest lifestyle possible.

Greg Specht, PT, OCS, ATC, CSCS, owner and clinical director of Specht Physical Therapy, is acknowledged as one of the top physical therapists in the region through his recognition as a Board Certified Clinical Specialist in Orthopedic Physical Therapy. Specht Physical Therapy is located at 207 Swansea Mall Drive in Swansea, MA.

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