

Physiotherapy

The central aim of physiotherapy (physical therapy) is to restore proper functioning to the body. In the case of permanent disease or injury, the aim is to reduce the impact of the dysfunction. Contrary to popular belief, physiotherapists aren't limited to the rehabilitation of sports injuries and back pain. As well as musculoskeletal injuries, physiotherapists can also manage:

- Neurological conditions, such as stroke
- Multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injuries
- Cardiothoracic conditions like emphysema, asthma and chronic bronchitis.

Physiotherapists can help a person to recover from surgery. Treatment options include a wide range of manual therapies, exercise programs and electrotherapy techniques, tailored to your specific condition. Your physiotherapist may work alone, or in collaboration with other health care providers, to offer a multifaceted approach to your rehabilitation.

Physiotherapists also work in schools, community health centres, fitness centres and in the workplace.

Three types of physiotherapy

Physiotherapy is an effective form of treatment for a wide range of conditions. It can also help speed recovery after many different types of surgery. Physiotherapists are trained in a range of specialist areas such as paediatrics, sports medicine or women's health. Generally, the three different types of physiotherapy include:

- **Musculoskeletal** – to treat muscles, bones and joints (also called orthopaedic physiotherapy). Common conditions treated include back pain, sprains, strains, arthritis, bursitis, workplace and sports injuries, problems with posture, incontinence and reduced mobility. Rehabilitation after surgery is also offered.
- **Cardiothoracic** – to treat disorders of the cardio-respiratory system including asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis, and to offer rehabilitation after thoracic surgery.
- **Neurological** – to treat disorders of the nervous system including acquired head injuries, stroke, spinal cord injuries, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis, and to offer rehabilitation after brain surgery.

A holistic approach

A physiotherapist works to improve your mobility and health and to reduce the risk of injuries. In many cases, an injury is caused by different factors working together. For example, persistent back pain may be triggered by a combination of poor posture, being overweight, repetitive work-related activities and incorrect technique when playing sport. The physiotherapist aims to treat the back pain, but also to address the factors which contribute to the cause. This approach aims to reduce the risk of the injury happening again.

A range of therapies

Physiotherapists draw upon a wide range of therapies, tailored to suit your individual needs. Some of these therapies include:

- **Manual therapies** – such as massage, stretching, manual resistance training, joint mobilisation and manipulation, including spinal mobilisation.
- **Electrotherapy techniques** – such as ultrasound, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), laser therapy and diathermy.
- **Exercise programs** – such as posture retraining, muscle strengthening, cardiovascular training and stretching.
- **Other services** – taping and splinting, correcting flawed sporting techniques, providing or offering information on equipment aids such as wheelchairs and walking frames.

Finding a physiotherapist

Physiotherapists in Australia are university trained, registered health care professionals. They work in a variety of places including hospitals, private practice, rehabilitation centres, nursing homes and sports clubs. You don't need a doctor's referral, but your doctor may recommend physiotherapy to help treat your condition or injury. Otherwise, the Australian Physiotherapy Association can help you find an appropriate physiotherapist in your area.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Physiotherapist
- Australian Physiotherapy Association Tel. (03) 9534 9400

Things to remember

- The central aim of physiotherapy (physical therapy) is to restore proper functioning to the body.
- Physiotherapy can treat many different disorders including musculoskeletal, neurological or cardiothoracic conditions.
- Physiotherapists in Australia are university trained, registered health care professionals.
- You don't need a doctor's referral to see a physiotherapist.

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