

Direct Access to Physical Therapy Services

The Basics of Going Directly to Your Physical Therapist

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What does direct access to physical therapy mean?

Direct access laws allow individuals to be evaluated, diagnosed, and treated by a physical therapist without referral from a physician or another healthcare professional. Direct access resulted from health care reform in state legislatures in the early 1990s, and was a solution to the problems of decreasing access to care and increasing costs. Currently individuals can seek care directly from a physical therapist throughout the United States and the District of Columbia.

Will I continue to receive a high quality of care like I do at my physician's office?

Yes. Physical therapists are now required to receive a doctoral degree in physical therapy and have received extensive training in evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment. They also have the option to complete post-graduate education in a variety of specialties. Your physical therapist should also establish communication with your family physician and other healthcare professionals to ensure that your care is coordinated and of the highest possible quality.

What do physical therapists do?

Many people think of physical therapy and think exercise. In many cases this is largely incorrect. While you will be prescribed a few condition-specific exercises, physical therapists also utilize a wide variety of manual or hands-on techniques to address your pain and improve mobility.

Physical therapists treat non-surgical and surgical impairments of many of the body's systems. Conditions include acute and chronic muscle and joint dysfunction of the upper and lower extremities back and neck pain, headaches, pelvic dysfunction, etc. Treatment for these conditions is likely to occur 1-2 times per week over several weeks with the ultimate goal being that the patient reaches a point where they no longer require treatment of any kind.

How do I know if I am appropriate for physical therapy treatment?

Upon arrival to your initial evaluation, the physical therapist will put you through a series of tests and measures to determine if you are appropriate for physical therapy treatment. If your symptoms are not appropriate for physical therapy treatment, you will be referred to your family physician for further examination or referral. Individuals with the following conditions/symptoms should visit their family physician first for further evaluation to determine if they will benefit from physical therapy treatment:

- Inability to reproduce pain with movement
- Personal or family history of cancer
- Recent infection