

**Path to Healing**  
***Physical Therapy for Neck Pain and Headaches***  
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Physical therapy is a natural way to regain health and to heal painful muscles, joints, and nerves, usually avoiding the need for surgery and other invasive alternatives. Unlike surgery or pain meds, physical therapy relies on a diverse assortment of techniques and strategies to *heal the source* of the problem. Not only is this preferable to most people desiring to avoid side-effects and dependence, but the effects can be longer lasting, empowering, and life-enriching. Physical therapy is unique in that it addresses the symptoms, the injury, and the cause of the injury. As a result, clients are empowered in techniques to heal and prevent.

Neck pain and headaches are complicated problems, and usually have multiple causes and aggravating factors. They can often include other symptoms such as numbness and tingling in arms or hands, jaw pain, mid-back pain, neck or back stiffness, and shoulder pain. They are often related to posture, muscle imbalances, dysfunctional movement patterns, repetitive stress, workplace ergonomics, or prior injuries. A skilled physical therapist is essential for evaluating these symptoms to determine whether they are related to problems with muscles, joints, or nerves, or if there may be signs of other problems requiring the insight of a physician. Most insurance plans recognize the importance of early screening and access to physical therapy, and do not require a physician's prescription to see your physical therapist.

Surprisingly, not everyone is a good candidate for physical therapy. To heal a challenging injury requires a commitment and partnership between the client and therapist. To benefit, the client must be ready and willing to take an active role in their healing process. The physical therapist diagnoses the source of the problem and works with the client to develop a program to heal it. Therapy typically starts with manual therapy addressing joint dysfunctions, muscle tightness, and nerve entrapments, and then progresses to include exercises for healing, strengthening, postural correction, and core stability.

Physical therapists are trained and in a diverse array of specialties, and work in areas as unique as neonatal care, stroke rehabilitation, post-surgical recovery, and orthopedics. *Manual Orthopedic* physical therapists are specifically trained to help clients heal and recover through hands-on care and a healing exercise program.

Finding a physical therapist whom understands your body and can explain your pain is a precious gift. Having control over your symptoms and understanding the path to healing is priceless.

*Is Your Headache Coming from Your Neck or Your Neck Pain Coming from Your Headache?*

People are complex. When your body is stuck in a painful pattern and not healing properly on its own, it is time to find out what is injured, why it happened, and what is keeping you from a full recovery. Neck pain and headaches have many causes and related factors such as individual

physical make-up, daily activities, and environmental factors. In one research study looking into cases of chronic headache pain, 20% were found to be caused by neck problems, which typically can be eliminated or improved with manual physical therapy. Other types of headaches also cause neck pain, which can refer pain back to the head, worsening the pain scenario. In both cases, physical therapy can be a very helpful to understand and help heal the specific problems.

### *Getting to Know Your Body*

Understanding your body is a beautiful thing. Most people do a combination of exercises they have collected throughout the years, while not knowing the particular effects of each. Reliable research supports the concept of optimal flexibility, showing that people who are too stiff *or too flexible* are more prone to injury. In one retrospective study, frequent stretching was actually associated with *increased* injury rates. Knowing which stretches and exercises are beneficial and which may be harmful is critical to reaching your full potential and getting the most out of life. Whatever your age, problem, or goals, every body type is different and benefits from a custom program that fits. Frequently, your physical therapist will be able to find and explain just how everything can be connected.

A course of physical therapy with a skilled manual orthopedic therapist provides clients with an education on themselves, tools to direct control in their lives, and the opportunity to live their lives on their terms unlimited by pain.

Additional information and resources about how physical therapy may benefit you can be found at [www.moveforwardpt.com/Default.aspx](http://www.moveforwardpt.com/Default.aspx) or [www.ostpt.com](http://www.ostpt.com).

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