

**Ensuring long-lasting benefits of physical therapy
treatment without recurrence of pain
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It is estimated that nearly 10 million American adults utilize outpatient physical therapy services each year (*Physical Therapy* journal). Nearly all of these people are referred to or choose to see their physical therapist to address pain or dysfunction that prevents them from living the lifestyle they hope to live. With appropriate treatment these people are able to return to their previous level of activity and achieve near 100% resolution of symptoms. Unfortunately it is not uncommon for physical therapists to have patients return to their clinic six months or even one year later for treatment of the same problem. This article will allow readers to make sure that they are getting the care that need and getting the answer to the question, “How do I make sure that my pain doesn’t come back?”

People develop pain and functional limitations for non-traumatic reasons including overuse and poor postures/movement patterns. As compared to an injury or surgery where the goal is simply rehabilitative, treatment of pain resulting from daily activities should also address ways in which these activities are completed. For example, a person whose neck pain and headaches worsen as they complete long hours of computer work should be instructed in workstation modifications in addition to common manual therapy and therapeutic exercise techniques used in physical therapy. Your physical therapist should complete extensive questioning to identify any factors of daily life that may contribute onset or recurrence of pain. They should also watch each of their patients complete simulated daily activities to identify impairments in the way that they move.

A person’s home exercise program is also a critical factor in making sure that pain does not come back. There is not a cookie-cutter exercise program for each type of pain. Physical therapists should work with each patient to ensure that their home exercises are appropriately challenging and will allow them to continue to make improvements even after they have completed physical therapy. Home treatment programs should be progressed regularly with the patient having a clear understanding of how long they should continue their program after they have been discharged from physical therapy. Remember, this aspect of treatment is a team effort. A patient who does not do their home exercise program as instructed is less likely to reach their goals.

Physical therapy should also taper in frequency as the patient eases back into normal daily activities. Early in the treatment process individuals are commonly treated two even three times per week to regain range of motion or address pain. Once these are achieved a person can begin to attend physical therapy less often. If the goal of treatment is to strengthen muscle groups a person can be largely independent with a good home program. It takes four weeks to begin to make strength gains, treatment should be used to progress exercises. When nearing discharge a person should be able to go 2-4 weeks between visits without worsening of symptoms.

Keeping the points made in this article in mind, a person should be able to receive the care that they need and make sure that they continue feeling great long after they are done with physical therapy. The goal of physical therapy treatment is to allow a person to achieve optimal quality of life and participation in societal activities. Make sure that your physical therapist is providing you with the care you need to live the life that you want to live without risk of recurrence of pain.