

# When You Should See A Physiotherapist

*What a physiotherapist really does has been largely misunderstood and unfortunately, wrongly perceived as simply 'helping one to walk or reduce the pain'. So, what then is physiotherapy or physical therapy? Cindy Ng, principal physiotherapist, Singapore General Hospital, enlightens.*

By definition, physiotherapy involves the assessment, treatment, rehabilitation and prevention of pain, injury, or any other physical dysfunction, through the use of education, exercise, manual therapy, electro-physical agents, technology or any other treatment for those purposes.

This includes (but is not limited to) rehabilitation, prescription of exercises, manual techniques and education.

A physiotherapist is trained to conduct clinical examinations or tests to determine the abnormalities in our movements and daily functions. Patients are usually referred to physiotherapy by their physicians or general practitioners.

## Chronic Diseases

Patients with chronic diseases such as heart conditions, diabetes, lung diseases, neurological diseases (for example, stroke, Parkinson's or spinal cord injuries), metabolic syndrome, chronic back pain and obesity, to name a few), may benefit from physiotherapy. These patients are examined and appropriate exercises prescribed to ensure better management of condition and improve quality of life. Patients have benefited carrying out suitable and safe exercises recommended by their physiotherapists and have reported improvement in their medical reports after rehabilitation.

## Acute Conditions

For acute conditions, for example post-surgical procedure, a recent joint or sport injury or even after a fall, it is important to see a physiotherapist to assess and prescribe suitable treatment to restore maximum mobility and functionality. If a person injures his ankle or knee during a casual game of soccer or if another finds that her knee hurts when climbing stairs or having back pain after carrying or lifting heavy items during spring cleaning, he or she should visit a physician who will likely refer the patient to a physiotherapist.

## Pre- and Post-surgery

For patients with risk factors such as lung disease, obesity or old age, physiotherapists are able to provide pre- and post-operative exercises and treatment to prevent complications post surgery and facilitate faster recovery and mobility.

Patients who suffer from lymphoedema, especially after breast surgery, can benefit from regular physiotherapy, with treatments such as manual lymphatic drainage and appropriate exercises to manage the swelling and discomfort.

## Holistic Approach

Physiotherapy is part of a holistic approach towards management of ageing, injuries and disease. Taking medications alone is insufficient and seeing a physiotherapist will help to maximise one's physical, psychological and social well-being.

A patient who is admitted to hospital due to stroke will be reviewed by a team of doctors, nurses and allied health care professionals that includes a physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will assess patient's state, sensation, movement, balance, as well as coordination and provide treatment to help the patient regain as many of the above abilities as possible.

## Neonatal, antenatal and postnatal

Women can benefit from both advice and treatment during pregnancy and in the early post natal period. Ante-natal and post-natal exercises are also conducted by physiotherapists to ensure appropriate exercises are carried out for health benefits such as stronger pelvic floor muscles, improve posture and prevent complications such as gestational diabetes.

For newborns, a physiotherapist is able to train mothers to carry out baby massages (to aid bonding and stimulate sensory growth) as well assist those with development delays or abnormalities such as torticollis (stiff neck associated with muscle shortening or contraction).

Physiotherapy is also able to evaluate and assist in falls preventions among the elderly or those with poor balance.

## Physiotherapy Services

Physiotherapy services are found in all hospitals and even some polyclinics as well as in the private sector. There are also physiotherapy services for athletes to manage and prevent injuries as well as in nursing homes to assist with rehabilitation.

As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure. You should consider seeing a physiotherapist in the prevention of injury or physical dysfunction, post trauma or injury or the management of a chronic disease. It is, however, important to bring along your medical reports or records to allow the physiotherapist to have a clear understanding of your condition.

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