

## Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy (physical therapy) aims to restore proper functioning to the body or, in the case of permanent disease or injury, to reduce the impact of any dysfunction.

Contrary to popular belief, physiotherapists aren't limited to the rehabilitation of sports injuries and back pain. As well as musculoskeletal injuries and conditions, 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, electrotherapy techniques and airway clearance techniques, tailored to your specific condition. Physiotherapists can also show you how to use, and where to get, equipment aids.

Your physiotherapist may work alone, or with other health care providers, to offer a multifaceted approach to your rehabilitation. Physiotherapists work in public hospitals, private practices, community health centres, rehabilitation centres, sporting clubs, fitness centres, schools and in the workplace.

As registered health professionals, physiotherapists are able to issue sick leave certificates.

### Types of physiotherapy

Physiotherapy is an effective form of treatment for a wide range of conditions. It can also help to speed recovery after many different types of surgery. Physiotherapists are trained in a range of specialist areas such as children's health (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. Rehabilitation after thoracic surgery can also be offered.
- **Neurological** – to treat disorders of the nervous system including acquired head injuries, stroke, spinal cord injuries, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. Rehabilitation after brain surgery can also be offered.

### 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 a range of 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 that contribute to the cause. This approach aims to lessen 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, and 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, and providing 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

- A physiotherapist
- Australian Physiotherapy Association Tel. (03) 9092 0888 or Find a Physio
- Your doctor

## 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.
- A physiotherapist can issue a sick leave certificate.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Australian Physiotherapy Association

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright** © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.