

## FAQS ABOUT PHYSICAL THERAPY

### Do I really need therapy?

Yes, if you want to get over your current problem, as well as prevent or limit further issues with your condition.

Although 85% of patients with acute back and neck pain can improve with time and conservative treatment, many have limited function and prolonged or recurrent pain. This results in reduced function and altered spine mechanics. Certain muscles weaken (atrophy) and others become overused. This imbalance results in more strain upon the already compromised back, neck and joints creating a vicious cycle that must be stopped in order to restore normal function.

Our therapy consists of purposeful remedial strengthening and ‘reprogramming’ of essential spinal and ‘core’ muscles. We use our hands to evaluate, monitor and treat muscle tone and alignment issues. We use specialized machines and gravity based exercises to increase your control and endurance. But, just as importantly, we teach you the proper spine mechanics when doing real-world activities, and we teach you the “do’s and don’ts” of exercise – whether in the gym or on your bedroom floor - to help prevent further problems.

### What should I bring to my first visit?

- A prescription from your doctor
- Insurance card, photo ID and any MRI or X-ray reports you may have
- Completed patient forms
- Wear comfortable clothing and closed toe shoes

### Can I skip therapy and just get injections?

Injections can be very helpful, and a number of our physical therapy patients have had successful injection therapy as part of their care. We often think of injections as a “reset button” where the “fire” in an angry joint or area surrounding an injured disc is “cooled”. But we also strongly believe the duration of relief provided by injections is directly related to how well you “behave” afterwards. If you don’t have a strong enough core to withstand spinal loading forces, and if you haven’t learned proper spine mechanics and proper “spine hygiene”, the benefits of your injection may be short-lived. Physical therapy is essential for assuring you have all the strength and knowledge needed to better prolong the positive effects of injections.

### I am athletic. Why do I need therapy?

We’ve observed that athletes and serious exercisers often are misinformed about what kinds of exercises are safe for their spine. A review of your current exercise regime is critical because it often reveals motions or forms that are biomechanically unsafe. Learning these insights is necessary to get (and stay) better even while continuing to exercise vigorously.

### How does your therapy differ from other clinics?

Most physical therapy clinics focus on relieving the acute (new onset) symptoms of intense pain and spasm, to quickly return you to regular activities. However, because research has shown that most spine pain is rooted in overuse and past injuries, you can expect another flare-up because the underlying condition has not been addressed. Our exercise-based rehab addresses these deeper problems with remedial strengthening and muscle reprogramming. We then teach you home exercises and proper spine care to stay improved.

### How much personal attention will I get in therapy?

*Plenty!* Almost all of our patients receive one-on-one treatment with a member of the physical therapy staff for the entirety of each therapy visit. This commitment to quality individual care is extremely uncommon in the physical therapy world. We recognize that spine patients need a lot of hands-on treatment and teaching, and that there are no shortcuts. Each patient is assigned a physical therapist and physical therapy assistant (team) so continuity of care is established.

### Will therapy make me worse?

*Apprehension is the greatest limiter of physical performance.* If you have been in pain for a long time, it is natural to question if your pain will increase upon starting an exercise program. Activating muscles that haven't been used in a while will cause your body to protest a bit (especially in the first few weeks). Keep in mind that our techniques of therapy are carefully designed to avoid putting discs and joints at risk. Our goal is to strengthen and reprogram muscle and nerve function to "unload" vulnerable spinal structures. Also, rest assured that it is our duty to listen to you and analyze your pain patterns to assure that nothing of alarm is happening as you progress through therapy.

### What if I might need surgery or injections?

Often the referring doctor wants to see if PT might improve the patient's symptoms before proceeding with injections or surgery. Other times we are sent patients who are already scheduled to have spine surgery but their surgeon wants to begin "pre-hab" strengthening before the procedure.

If your response to physical therapy indicates that you might indeed benefit from surgery or injections, we will schedule a prompt consultation with Dr. Doerr. We will also inform the referring doctor and obtain whatever data is needed (X-rays, MRI, and therapy notes) to allow for an informed decision to be made.

### What about my chiropractor or personal trainer?

The hardest task in caring for your spine problem is matching the right treatment to the condition. Chiropractic manipulations, acupuncture, massage therapy, surgery, injections, and physical therapy are reasonable treatments at particular times for certain conditions in different people. Because other activities or therapies may either negate or aggravate our treatment, we may ask you to refrain from other activities or treatments and reintroduce them later as your condition stabilizes.

### What if I don't get better?

If your spine or other orthopedic condition/problem doesn't get better with therapy, this may indicate your condition needs more investigation or the services of a spine surgeon or pain specialist. We believe it is our responsibility to our patients to establish a diagnosis and refer appropriately if we are unable to help.

### Is this covered by insurance?

Yes, if your insurance plan covers physical therapy

### Do I need a referral to have physical therapy/rehab?

Yes, a physical therapy order from a doctor is required to begin treatment. The choice is yours *where* you wish to have therapy. Please be aware that some insurance plans may require pre-authorization before beginning treatment. Call us if you have questions.

### I was sent for physical therapy. Will I get to see Dr. Doerr, too?

If you were sent here for physical therapy and have met the physical therapy milestones but your problem has not been resolved, your case will be presented to and reviewed by Dr. Doerr.

### Do you take care of other joints as well as the spine?

**YES!** In fact, because we are orthopedic physical therapists, our staff is trained to treat all muscle and joint issues within the body. Many physicians refer patients who are experiencing overlapping issues because we will spend the time to analyze, sort out and thoughtfully treat their problems.

### Can't you just show me the exercises I need to do that will make me better?

Yes, but it takes a bit longer than you might think. We devote a significant amount of time teaching you proper form during exercise. Because some exercises look pretty "standard" to the untrained eye, it is extremely important to understand the slight variations that may aggravate/worsen an issue and learn how your body should feel while doing the exercises correctly.

### I don't have time for physical therapy...

Taking care of health problems can be time consuming and inconvenient. Physical therapy is an investment to reduce your overall inconvenience by learning exercises, stretches and strategies to control, manage, and even heal your problem. Taking some time now can help you be more independent in the future. We are here to help you solve the current problem as well as prevent future problems.

### How long with physical therapy take?

At your first physical therapy visit (initial evaluation), we will work with you in establishing treatment goals that are measurable within certain time frames. The initial evaluation usually lasts about 60 minutes. The frequency of therapy will be discussed and decided between patient and therapist. The typical treatment frequency is twice a week until your goals are met. Before discharge, we will equip you with strategies and exercises that will help you self-manage your symptoms. Each treatment session is typically 45-60 minutes in duration.

### Can't you teach my personal trainer to do my therapy?

Personal trainers do a great job of supervising exercise programs to develop and maintain overall strength and conditioning. But, they are not trained or credentialed to treat injuries and often do not understand the physiology and healing times associated with your injury. Physical Therapists are trained in biomechanics, kinesiology and the science of injury repair. Their job is to analyze, treat and rehab you when something is not right. They will also teach you the do's and don'ts for your specific problem. Through this process you will be able to work with your trainer to modify your exercise program so you can stay well.

### My doctor/ trainer gave me some exercises for my back (or other orthopedic conditions). I am doing them but getting worse. Why?

While some exercises are good for your back or orthopedic condition, some can actually worsen the condition. Once we diagnose the problem, we can select the correct exercises and teach you how to do them properly. Even if you have pictures or videos of the exercises, keeping perfect form while doing them isn't always easy. For example, even a simple squat done incorrectly can rupture a lumbar disc! Our physical therapists provide feedback and coaching so you get it right.