



Physiotherapy

What do they do?

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT A PHYSIOTHERAPIST MUST DO IS TO TEACH YOU A SIMPLE PROGRAMME OF EXERCISES.

These exercises must not involve going to a gym. If apparatus is required then it must be basic and easily transportable. This programme should be done every day, whether at home, in a hotel room or wherever you may find yourself. It must become part of your daily routine, as naturally as dressing, having breakfast and cleaning your teeth. Nobody has the excuse of 'being too busy' to do 20 minutes exercise per day.

Just as importantly, you should continue the programme once the pain is a dim distant memory. If you do this as a preventative regime, your chance of having further episodes of pain is reduced and should they occur be much less severe and shorter lived.

Physiotherapists are very much involved in the treatment of mechanical pain in particular. Usually they will make an assessment of the problem by taking a history of the problem, for example:

- How did it start?
- What did you do?
- Where is the pain?
- What makes it worse?

Then they will examine you to look for:

- Muscle spasm
- Muscle weakness
- Abnormal movement patterns
- Asymmetry in movement
- Joint instability
- Poor posture

Whilst you are with the therapist they may employ techniques to bring immediate relief:

- Acupuncture

- Soft tissue release
- Laser therapy
- Hands-on manipulation or massage

They may advise on:

- Ergonomics – particularly when at your computer either at home or at work
- Dietary advice. A balanced diet is crucial to have the energy to exercise and recover. Weight loss should then come naturally
- Progressing to or back to sporting activity in a graduated fashion

All physiotherapists will place different emphasis on the different components of your treatment. No therapist can always hit the correct package for an individual patient every time. An exercise package needs to be reviewed over the weeks of treatment eliminating exercises that aggravate the problem and substituting others. Exercises should start with simple options and more challenging and complex manoeuvres added as strength and confidence grows.

Exercise is NOT a situation where there is 'no pain no gain'. Some muscle soreness is to be expected after exercise especially to start with. You may be using some muscles for the first time in a long time and this will settle with time. If exercise is persistently provoking the fundamental pain problem, then something is not right and a medical review may then be appropriate.

Pain-killing medications are not a substitute for physiotherapy exercise. The rationale for pain-killers is as a short term measure to enable you to develop strength and flexibility without the pain preventing you from getting started.