

# 7 Things To Know Before Choosing a Physical Therapist

The time period following the realization that you need orthopedic surgery can be quite overwhelming. You need to make sure that your personal and professional obligations are in order, that you can make the best use of your insurance coverage, and that you choose the right physician, surgeon and physical therapist.

The most important thing to remember in this situation is that ultimately, YOU are the head of your personal health care team, and are entitled to choose the most appropriate health care professionals to meet your personal health goals. What follows below are 7 points that will help you feel confident in this role, and will help you choose a physical therapist devoted to helping you return to optimal condition following your injury.

## 1. Understand What Physical Therapy IS— And What It Is NOT!

Physical Therapy is an approach to treatment of joint, muscle, nerve, and bone problems that is geared to relieve or eliminate pain, improve range of motion, improve strength, and optimize an individual's ability to move and function in all aspects of life.

Physical Therapy involves a comprehensive evaluation of an individual that includes taking a detailed history of the individual's problems, goals for treatment, and medical issues. A detailed neuromuscular and functional examination of the individual is then made to determine the cause and best treatment for the person's problem.

Physical Therapy treatments include manual techniques such as joint and soft tissue mobilization, manipulation, and massage. Therapeutic exercises and activities to improve motion and strength, relieve pain, and improve function are always an integral part of a Physical Therapy Program. Prevention, posture, and ergonomic education helps individuals receiving Physical Therapy to improve or maintain the results achieved in treatment.

Physical Therapy (PT) is NOT pain and torture. Although many injuries and post-surgical conditions by their nature are painful, appropriate Physical Therapy treatments should be designed to relieve symptoms and improve your function to speed your recovery. Physical Therapy treatments often involve effort on the part of the patient, but “no pain, no gain” has very little role in quality Physical Therapy intervention.

## 2. Who Is a Physical Therapist?

Physical Therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who evaluate, diagnose and treat people of all ages with medical and post-surgical problems or other health related conditions that limit their ability to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives.

PTs must have a graduate degree from an accredited physical therapy program before taking the state licensure examination. The minimum educational requirement is a master's degree, yet most educational programs now offer the doctor of physical therapy (DPT) degree.

Although some insurance companies require a physician referral for payment, therapists with direct access licensure can see patients without the need for a referral.

## 3. Understand Your Rights as a Patient.

Again, remember that you are the head of your health care team, and that you have a choice when it comes to selecting the physical therapist that best suits your needs. Your doctor will often make recommendations regarding where you receive physical therapy, but the decision of where you go is ultimately up to you.

In addition to being able to choose your own health care providers, some of your additional rights as a patient include:

- Respect from all personnel throughout your care
- Access to information regarding practice policies

continued...



**READING BERKS PHYSICAL THERAPY, LLC**

**Orthopedic & Sports Rehabilitation** “Your Trusted Choice For Over 20 Years”

**Find out more at [www.readingberkspt.com](http://www.readingberkspt.com) or call 1.888.877.RBPT (7277)**

- APTA Standards of Care
- Notice of any financial arrangement between therapy provider and referral source
- Consultation, evaluation, treatment, and preventative care in accordance with state and national regulations
- Access to the names, professional status, and educational credentials of the physical therapist and any other personnel participating in your care
- Adequate, clear information in order to be able to give informed consent prior to initiation of any treatment plan
- The right to participation in decisions
- Understanding of the goals, desired outcomes, and procedures rendered throughout treatment
- Access to medical information
- Privacy
- Safe provision of services
- That written permission will be obtained before any medical records are disclosed to parties not participating in your care (except insurance companies)
- Advance knowledge of any costs associated with each visit or a missed visit

#### 4. Choose a Therapy Office That Meets Your Needs.

Once you understand what physical therapy is, and what your rights are as a patient, it is now time to start looking for a therapy office that is right for you. This is much more than just checking to make sure that the practice offers services for your particular type of injury or post-surgical need. You also need to look at the culture of the practice itself, its accessibility and ability to work within your schedule, obligations, transportation needs, etc.

What is the culture of a physical therapy practice? The culture depends on the therapists, therapist assistants, clerical staff, and even billing assistants. You want to find a devoted set of professionals whose main goal is to work with you to retain optimal physical condition. Try to find

a practice that will commit to a devoted therapist that will be available for each visit. This helps create a much more personalized and effective course of treatment for a patient. Also make sure to choose a physical therapist who makes you feel comfortable. You may need to partially undress for some forms of therapy. It's important that you can relax. Lastly, make sure to choose a physical therapy office that has hours and office location(s) to match your needs. Quite often, your work schedule may interfere with the hours of physical therapy. If you have a problem taking off work, you may need to find a therapy office that offers before or after work hours. It also helps to make sure that the office is close to either your home or office to make the commute as quick as possible.

#### 5. Consider the Credentials

Make sure to review the credentials of the physical therapist and the therapy team. This can be confusing because the physical therapy profession is undergoing a transition regarding the degree received by new graduates.

Today, graduates receive either a Doctorate (DPT) or a Masters (MPT) in physical therapy, whereas therapists who graduated several years ago received a Bachelors (BSPT) or Masters (MPT) with a similar level of education.

Many therapists pursue postgraduate credentials, which include earning certification in some 10 areas of specialization such as sports, orthopedics, and manual therapy.

Be aware of credentials such as physical therapist assistant (PTA). PTAs are the only individuals licensed in Pennsylvania to assist your physical therapist with your care. Many clinics employ physical therapy technicians or aides who are not licensed to provide physical therapy. While these individuals may have some practical training, they do not have the educational and clinical qualifications to perform physical therapy services in Pennsylvania.

**Important note:** Not all therapists are required to attend continuing education courses to maintain their state license!

continued...



**READING BERKS PHYSICAL THERAPY, LLC**

**Orthopedic & Sports Rehabilitation** “Your Trusted Choice For Over 20 Years”

**Find out more at [www.readingberkspt.com](http://www.readingberkspt.com) or call 1.888.877.RBPT (7277)**

While this may sound like a limitation, it is actually a great opportunity: Because continuing education is not a state requirement, it is a sign of a conscientious, dedicated therapist if they keep up with the latest in the industry. Try to find a therapist devoted to their own personal and professional growth through continuing education.

## 6. Visit the Facility/Ask Around

It is important to evaluate the facility where you will be receiving your physical therapy services. A good practice will even encourage you to stop by to visit the facility before your initial consultation visit to acclimate yourself to the set-up and the equipment. Check to make sure the facility is large enough to see patients in comfort and maintain modesty. Look for individual treatment rooms or curtains that can be pulled to provide a more private treatment area. Consider touring two or three facilities prior to deciding where you want to receive therapy.

Finally, ask around! Speak to your friends, physician and family, the people you trust, or even a stranger on crutches. If others are satisfied with their care, then you probably will be as well.

## 7. Understand the Physical Therapy Process.

Your first visit should include an evaluation by the physical therapist. Your physical therapist will perform an examination to identify current and potential problems. Based on the results of the examination, and considering your specific goals, your physical therapist will design a plan of care to include specific interventions and will propose a timetable to achieve these goals and optimize your function. Your physical therapist should also provide you with instructions to perform exercises at home to facilitate your recovery.

You have the right to have access to all information gathered during your initial session, and to be updated regularly on the status of your improvement. Physical therapy is a mutual arrangement, maintained by both you and your therapy provider.

## Conclusion

The most important thing to remember, and to never, ever forget in any situation involving your personal health, is that you have the right to choose your own care, and the responsibility to make sure you get the best care possible. You should have a therapist who talks through the treatment process with you and treats you as the decision-maker, and you should always feel comfortable asking your physical therapist any questions regarding your course of care, including specifics regarding interventions and expectations.

---

**For more information on the services provided by Reading-Berks Physical Therapy, visit [www.readingberkspt.com](http://www.readingberkspt.com).**



**READING BERKS PHYSICAL THERAPY, LLC**

**Orthopedic & Sports Rehabilitation** *“Your Trusted Choice For Over 20 Years”*

**Find out more at [www.readingberkspt.com](http://www.readingberkspt.com) or call 1.888.877.RBPT (7277)**