

You Have the Right To Choose Where To Go For Physical Therapy

Authored by Melissa Rhoades Beck, PT, MPT at Northern Rehab Physical Therapy Specialists



CHOOSE THE SAFER WAY TO MANAGE PAIN.

#ChoosePT
MoveForwardPT.com

Photo: Choose PT Campaign – Safer Way to Manage Pain.png

You just finished packing and carrying that last box of Holiday decorations down to the basement when, “uh-oh” back pain. What do you do now?

Research shows that early intervention results in quicker return to function rather than waiting to see if your pain will disappear on its own. Physical therapy has proven to be a good option for relieving aches and pains that may be the result of an injury, surgery, or just plain overuse.

Once you have realized that physical therapy can help you, there are 4 key points that you should know before choosing a physical therapist. First and foremost, you are the CEO of your healthcare team. This entitles YOU to make the best and most informed decision on choosing the right physical therapist, or even physician and surgeon (if necessary). Illinois laws have recently changed and now allows you to see a physical therapist without requiring you to see your doctor first. This leads to quicker intervention, and in most cases, lowers your healthcare costs. Whether you choose to see your doctor, or go directly to physical therapy first, follow the 4 points below to make an educated decision on which physical therapy practice is best for you:

1. **Learn about physical therapy.** Physical therapy is a non-invasive treatment approach to relieving pain and dysfunction through gently treating the joints, muscles and nerves. Our goal is to optimize your quality of life by returning you to activities that may have otherwise caused pain. The old motto “no pain, no gain” generally does not apply in physical therapy. Contrary to popular belief, we work with you to help relieve pain, not cause it. Though some injury conditions are painful within themselves, physical therapy is designed to relieve painful symptoms while decreasing recovery time.

2. **Know your rights as a patient.** As a patient, YOU have the right to CHOOSE your care. Often, a physician will order where to go for physical therapy. Remember, you are the head of your healthcare team which now puts the ball in your court to decide what is best for you. You have the right to be informed of any financial arrangement between the therapy provider and referral source. You also have the ability to access information regarding practice policies. This includes how your treatment session is billed and whether or not you will be penalized for canceling or not showing for an appointment. All medical offices should also be compliant with HIPAA guidelines which are in place to protect your privacy.

3. **Choose a Physical Therapy office with which you are comfortable.** As the leader of your healthcare team, you have the right to choose a physical therapy practice, and a therapist, that suits you. A physician can make a suggestion, but ultimately, the choice is yours. The easiest way to learn about clinics in your area is to ask your family, friends, and neighbors if they have any experience with physical therapy. You'll want to learn what the feel of the clinic is, their culture, and their model of treatment. Will you see the same therapist at each visit? Will you be treated by the physical therapist or the physical therapist assistant/athletic trainer? Will the therapist be treating more than one patient at a time? Does the location suit you? Do the hours work well with your schedule? Is the front office polite and helpful with insurance questions and scheduling? You may also want to know the treatment model. Do they use manual therapy techniques? Will you be performing an exercise program? Do they use modalities such as electrical stimulation or heat? If you do not know what you find important regarding a treatment model, then it is encouraged to talk to a physical therapist first to discuss plan of care options. You will want to determine what is important to you.

4. **Visit the facility.** This is important to help you learn what to expect. A staff member should give you a tour of the clinic and help you understand the physical therapy process. On this visit, you can gain an idea of the atmosphere in a clinic and the helpfulness of not only the physical therapist, but other staff members as well. They should describe to you that your first visit will be an initial evaluation where the physical therapist will determine current or potential problems. A plan of care will then be developed based on your goals and time frame to reach your optimum function. Lastly, this is a good time to discuss costs and insurance benefits with the office staff.

In conclusion, the most important thing to remember is that you have the ability to choose what is best for YOU! You can choose physical therapy as a first option when you experience pain or injury. You have the option to shop around for a physical therapist and clinic that meets your needs and makes you feel comfortable. It's time to start making informed decisions about your healthcare so that you can live your life moving forward and accomplish your goals with less pain. Physical therapy should teach you self-management skills and how to avoid painful situations in the future so that hopefully next time you will avoid that "uh-oh" moment.