Workers' Comp

Physical Therapy Frequently Asked Questions

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4 MIN READ

What is physical therapy and how does it benefit injured employees in their recovery?

Physical therapy (PT) focuses on the evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of individuals with physical impairments, disabilities or injuries. The primary goal of physical therapy is to help patients restore, maintain and improve their physical function, mobility and overall well-being.

When is physical therapy necessary in workers' compensation?

In workers' compensation, most injuries are musculoskeletal. Therapy plays a crucial role in the recovery process for these injuries and is almost always beneficial. Even mild strains and sprains can significantly improve with a brief course of therapy aimed at reducing swelling, enhancing motion and strength, and equipping patients with a home exercise program (HEP).

Initiating therapy early can help prevent the worsening of the condition and reduce the risk of re-injury due to compensatory movements, altered gait or unnecessary immobilization. Physical therapists provide valuable education, guiding patients through their condition, treatment plan and self-management strategies to prevent future injuries and complications. To maximize recovery, therapy should commence as soon as cleared by a medical doctor, ideally within 3–5 days post-injury.

What should the injured employee expect during the first PT appointment?

- A physical therapist will conduct a thorough evaluation to assess a patient's physical abilities, limitations and functional status.
    - This evaluation includes examining factors such as range of motion, strength, balance, gait and overall functional mobility.
- Based on the assessment, the physical therapist will establish a diagnosis and create a personalized treatment plan tailored to the patient's specific needs and goals.

    - Therapy typically begins at 2–3 times per week for 3–4 weeks and will be adjusted according to each patient's individual requirements.

- A home exercise program (HEP) should be provided during the initial visit.

How long is a typical physical therapy session?

Each session lasts one hour and includes a blend of active treatments such as manual therapy, therapeutic activities and neuromuscular re-education, alongside therapeutic exercises and modalities. Passive modalities like heat/cold therapy, electrical stimulation and ultrasound should be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes, while active treatments should constitute at least 50% of the session time.

For non-surgical cases, the typical duration of therapy is 12 visits over a period of 4–6 weeks, whereas surgical cases may require up to 24 visits spanning 8–12 weeks.

What should be included in evaluations and progress notes?

- All physical therapy evaluations should assess the range of motion and strength of the affected joint, the patient's ability to perform daily activities, and their pain level.

- For workers' compensation patients, it’s crucial to also evaluate their capacity to perform work-related tasks. Ideally, the physical therapist should receive a job description to align the patient's abilities and goals, but they can also create job requirements based on the patient’s self-report.

- Comprehensive progress notes are required every two weeks or after six visits, detailing the current status, progress toward goals, and discharge planning.

What are common physical therapy treatments and modalities?

1. **Therapeutic Exercises**
   CPT Code: 97110—Therapeutic exercise to develop strength and endurance, range of motion, and flexibility.

2. **Neuromuscular Re-education**
   CPT Code: 97112—Neuromuscular reeducation of movement, balance, coordination, kinesthetic sense, posture, and/or proprioception for sitting and/or standing activities.

3. **Manual Therapy Techniques**
   CPT Code: 97140—Manual therapy techniques (e.g., mobilization/manipulation of the joint or soft-tissue,

manual lymphatic drainage, manual traction), one or more regions, each 15 minutes.

4. **Therapeutic Activities**
   CPT Code: 97530—Therapeutic activities, direct (one-on-one) patient contact (use of dynamic activities to improve functional performance), each 15 minutes.

5. **Electrical Stimulation**
   CPT Code: 97032—Application of a modality to one or more areas; electrical stimulation (manual), each 15 minutes.

6. **Ultrasound**
   CPT Code: 97035—Ultrasound, therapeutic, includes topical application(s), when performed, each 15 minutes.

7. **Mechanical Traction**
   CPT Code: 97012—Application of a modality to one or more areas; traction, mechanical.

8. **Gait Training**
   CPT Code: 97116—Gait training (includes stair climbing), each 15 minutes.

How do I secure physical therapy services for my injured employee?

Apricus Physical Medicine offers streamlined workers' compensation rehabilitation services that simplify processes, ensure clinical oversight and effectively manage costs. When you contact us, you'll gain access to an extensive provider network that facilitates easy access to therapy. Our centralized services and cost management help reduce expenses while achieving better outcomes for injured employees.

Whether it's home health, durable medical equipment, diagnostics or another specialty service, Apricus Specialty Solutions offer a one-stop-shop experience to make sure those recovering from an injury get what they need, when they need it.

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