



Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy intervention following Stroke is considered a hallmark of the traditional rehabilitation process. Recovery can and does occur naturally, however current literature shows that appropriate physiotherapy intervention is essential in optimising function, mobility and quality of life. It is seen as most important in the early stages, within the first six months post-Stroke, but also extremely relevant in chronic situations up to 15 years post-Stroke and beyond.

Most people who have had a Stroke will have crossed paths with a physiotherapist if they were admitted to hospital. They may have even been fortunate enough to receive ongoing therapy at home after discharge. Making the move to seek a private physiotherapist after public services have ceased however can be a whole different kettle of fish.

Physiotherapy is a broad term which can cover a range of therapeutic techniques from massage and manipulation to gait retraining and sporting injuries. Most physiotherapists will know a bit about everything but tend to specialise in one particular area such as sports injuries, manipulation or neurological conditions. To get the best out of your therapy, it is important to choose a physio who has neurological experience, especially in Stroke. To do this, you may need to search further than your local physiotherapy practice for the best care.

So how do you find a physio in the community that knows about Stroke? The first thing to try is accessing the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) through their phone number or website. The Australian Physiotherapy Association is the national professional body for qualified physiotherapists. They have a 'find a physio' link that will filter your search specific to your location and special needs. The APA has long supported the concept of categorising physiotherapists in their special interest and clinical areas as well as providing a pathway for continued education and specialist recognition. Narrowing the field to neurology will automatically select physios who are members of the National Neurology Group.

Physiotherapists in this category have a special interest in neurological conditions and will have a better understanding of the neurological system and prognostic treatment pathways, particularly for Stroke management. Most of these physios have a background working in multidisciplinary rehabilitation units, they have had more exposure to treatment of neurological conditions, focused their professional development on management for neurological conditions and know how to access more services such as aids, equipment and new treatment strategies.

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Therapists found under this search will be listed hierarchically. At the top of the list will be Specialist Neurological Physiotherapists. As a Fellow of the Australian College of Physiotherapists, this therapist would have attained the highest level of expertise in neurology via a rigorous training and examination process. They may contribute to the professional education of colleagues, actively engage in their own professional development and have had involvement in research activities. There are currently seven Specialist Neurological Physiotherapists in Australia at present.

Below this will be Titled Neurological Physiotherapists. To qualify as a Level Two or Titled Member, further study (e.g., a coursework Masters Degree in neurology, or study through the alternate pathway established by the National Neurology Group) is required. When a member becomes a Titled Member of the National Neurology Group the member has the right to use the words 'APA Neurological Physiotherapist' after their name. There are currently 49 Titled Neurological Physiotherapists in Australia.

Finally, other qualified physiotherapists and APA members will be below this as a Level One member of the group.

To contact the APA National Office phone: 1300 306 622 (within Australia) or visit their website on www.physiotherapy.asn.au

What to expect from your physiotherapist

Like all physiotherapy assessments, the overall management of your neurological problem involves a similar process:

- Observing and assessing your movement and your overall physical condition;
- Analysing and identifying your problems;
- Developing a treatment program with you (and your family or carers) and, where appropriate, other members of the health care team;
- Managing the treatment or training program based on your jointly agreed goals; and
- Evaluating progress, modifying treatment if necessary, and stopping treatment once goals have been reached.

The brochure 'What to expect from your physiotherapist' was produced by the APA to provide information to physiotherapy consumers on choosing a physiotherapist, what to expect from your physiotherapist and what to do if you are not satisfied with the physiotherapy treatment received. This brochure is also available in Chinese, Japanese or Korean.



No need for a referral

A doctor's referral is not necessary to see a physiotherapist in private practice, although frequently your doctor will work in partnership with a physio to plan and manage treatment for a specific condition.

What will it cost?

Physiotherapy services are generally not rebateable under the Federal Government Medicare scheme except as part of the Chronic Disease Management Programme organised through your GP; however, a proportion of treatment costs are rebateable under all higher tables of private health insurance schemes. The Trade Practices Act prevents the Australian Physiotherapy Association from providing a recommended schedule of fees for physiotherapy services. As a physiotherapy patient, you can expect to pay an initial consultation fee, and subsequent visits will incur a reduced standard consultation.

Medicare subsidies for physiotherapy

Did you know that Medicare can cover physiotherapy for some people? In June 2004, the Federal Government introduced access to Medicare funded physiotherapy. The Medicare Chronic Disease Management program provides more preventive care to older Australians. The program also improves care co-ordination between GPs and health professionals who provide care for people of any age with chronic conditions and complex care needs. Under this program, certain people can gain access to Medicare rebates for up to five allied health and three dental services per year (this programme will be expanded as of June 2021). A chronic condition is one that is of more than six months duration. Your GP will be able to assess whether you have complex care needs. To access Medicare funded physiotherapy, you will need to speak to your GP about whether you are eligible for this initiative.

If eligible, you and your doctor will develop a care plan. You will then be able to access up to five Medicare funded allied health services in a calendar year. Your physio will communicate with you and your doctor about your progress and at the end of your treatment there is an opportunity for your GP to review the care plan and discuss your future healthcare needs.

For more information about the EPC program talk to your physiotherapist and your GP, go to the Medicare Australia website www.medicare.gov.au or call Medicare Australia on 132 011.

For more information about any of the information on this fact sheet please contact Melissa McConaghy on 02 9906 7777 or email Melissa@archealth.com.au

