

FINDING A PHYSIOTHERAPIST TO MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN

Physiotherapists help people living with conditions such as chronic pain improve their quality of life, improve physical functioning and support their recovery. A physiotherapist is a health care professional who works from a patient-centered approach and uses knowledge of anatomy, kinesiology and physiology to assess, treat and manage pain, injuries, movement dysfunction and chronic conditions. For more information about physiotherapists, visit the following website:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/physiotherapy>

FINDING A PHYSIOTHERAPIST

The following online resources may be helpful in locating a physiotherapist near you:

- <https://painbc.ca/find-help/help-near-you>
- <https://bcphysio.org/find-a-physio>

CHOOSING A PHYSIOTHERAPIST

When choosing a physiotherapist in BC, you should search for a physiotherapist registered with the College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia (CPTBC) on their website: <https://cptbc.org/>. Those registered with the CPTBC must uphold the College's standards of practice and code of ethical conduct.

Once you have selected a physiotherapist, you may consider requesting an initial consultation to ensure they are the right fit for you. The physiotherapist may offer a free consultation. During this initial consultation, you may consider asking the following questions to better understand their approach to treating people with chronic pain:

- What can you teach me to support me with managing my pain?
- How will you help me move with more ease?

A physiotherapist with knowledge of chronic pain will answer the above questions with:

- An emphasis on functional improvement (i.e., ability to move better, ability to complete daily activities with more ease, etc.) instead of a "cure".
- Equal emphasis on providing manual/in-house treatments and teaching at-home exercises and strategies.

- An explanation of the science of chronic pain.

You may also consider asking about any additional training they have in chronic pain, such as the ones mentioned below, or other accredited professional education:

- Pain BC – Pain Foundations: <https://www.painbc.ca/health-professionals/education/pain-foundations>
- Pain BC – Moving Through Pain: <https://www.painbc.ca/health-professionals/education/gentle-movement-and-relaxation-course>
- Pain BC – Gentle Movement & Relaxation, Moving Through Pain
- Pain BC – Making Sense of Pain: <https://www.painbc.ca/making-sense-of-pain>
- Explain Pain – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCGvNwJDtvU>

PAYING FOR PHYSIOTHERAPY

Often, physiotherapy clinics accept extended health benefits, such as employer-provided insurance, to cover the cost of sessions. If you have this type of coverage, you should confirm with your prospective physiotherapist or physiotherapy clinic to ensure they will accept your benefits. Along with this, you can check with your insurer that they will cover your prospective practitioner and understand any maximum amount they will pay for physiotherapy. It is important to note that not all clinics and/or insurers offer direct billing, so if paying out of pocket until you are reimbursed will be difficult, you should factor this into your decision-making as well.

If you do not have extended health benefits, you may be eligible for Medical Services Plan (MSP) supplementary benefits, which provide partial payment for certain medical services provided in British Columbia. MSP supplementary benefits support with the payment of a variety of approved providers (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/benefits/services-covered-by-msp/supplementary-benefits>), including physiotherapy. There are eligibility requirements to access this benefit – learn more here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/benefits/services-covered-by-msp/supplementary-benefits>. If you receive provincial income assistance you are automatically enrolled in this benefit. If you do not receive income assistance you can apply for this benefit online here: <https://my.gov.bc.ca/msp/benefit/eligibility>

If you qualify for the MSP supplementary benefit, MSP will contribute \$23 per physiotherapist visit, for a combined total of 10 visits per year. Many physiotherapists have opted out of MSP coverage. This means they are allowed to charge patients more than \$23 per visit. Opted-out practitioners must advise their

patients prior to the treatment being performed that they have opted out, how much is reimbursed by MSP, and how much the patient will be paying in addition to the MSP fee. As such, you may consider obtaining price comparisons from a variety of physiotherapy clinics to find the clinic with the least out-of-pocket cost.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PHYSIOTHERAPY SESSIONS

Going to a physiotherapist may seem overwhelming and intimidating if you do not know what to expect or have not had successful experiences in the past. Here are a few tips to help you plan for a productive and positive experience with the physiotherapist of your choice.

(1) Create a plan and have a goal:

- Ensure your physiotherapist walks you through your treatment plan. A physiotherapist with knowledge of chronic pain should be able to communicate a plan and explain how it will help your pain management.
- Ensure your physiotherapist has explained the end goal (i.e., the best result and/or outcome based on their assessment). The end goal should be the end of your involvement with your physiotherapist. By this point, your physiotherapist should have equipped you with the tools to continue to manage your pain at home.

(2) When prescribed take-home exercises, ensure the physiotherapist has thoroughly explained and demonstrated all of the exercises during the session. To help you remember how to complete your exercises properly and safely at home, you may consider requesting one or all the following:

- Ask your physiotherapist to record videos of you doing the exercise and send them to you.
- Ask for handouts from your physiotherapist about your exercises.
- Ask for video recordings of the exercises.
- Ask about online programs or apps you can follow at home.
- Ask your physiotherapist to email you a list of what was covered in your session.

To recap, evidence-informed pain care and pain management from a physiotherapist will include the following:

- A thorough assessment, including a physical evaluation and an opportunity to tell your story.

- A treatment plan that is centered on your individual goals related to decreasing pain and moving with more ease.
- Pain education so you understand the importance of self-care and movement. (<https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education>)
- Strategies to help decrease pain and improve your ability to complete self-care and movement exercises.
- A home exercise plan, specifically, a program that you can and will do.
- Self-care techniques – we may have more influence over pain than we know!

RESOURCES

- Gentle movements at home: <https://painbc.ca/gentle-movement-at-home>
- Rethinking pain: Using movement as an educational tool to manage pain: <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/mind-body-techniques/rethinking-pain-using-movement-as-an-educational-tool-to-manage-pain>
- Free self-guided exercise programs for pain: <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/mind-body-techniques/free-self-guided-exercise-programs-for-pain>
- Pain Support Line: call 1-844-880-PAIN (7246) <https://www.painbc.ca/about/programs/pain-support-line>
- HealthLink BC: call 811 <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/more/about-healthlink-bc/about-8-1-1>

REFERENCES

- HealthLink BC resource on physiotherapy: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/physiotherapy>
- College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia: <https://cptbc.org/>
- Medical Services Plan (MSP) supplementary benefits: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/benefits/services-covered-by-msp/supplementary-benefits>

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