

How Physical Therapy Expedites The Healing Process

When injuries result in damage to musculoskeletal parts of the body, the treating physician often needs to send an injured employee to physical therapy. Physical therapy is a medical service designed to develop, maintain or restore the employee's normal body movements. At the first visit the physical therapist will review the injury information provided by the physician, the amount of care prescribed and then determine a treatment plan to address the employee's needs. The treatment plan may include improving flexibility, endurance, strength, coordination and balance.

Usually the first step is to introduce therapy designed to reduce swelling, stiffness or pain. The initial modalities may include water hydrotherapy, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, heat packs and cold packs. These are normally followed by stretching, walking, weight lifting and various types of exercise. The physical therapist will teach exercises to be done at home that are specifically designed for the employee's type of injury. Doing the home exercises is essential to helping the patient recover quickly.

In addition, the therapist will create a total treatment plan. This will include educating the employee on how to avoid re-injury and injury caused by repetitive motion. The best physical therapists also incorporate the psychological and emotional support needed by the injured employee into their treatment plan. Soft tissue injuries do not heal themselves, and most people will not exercise an injury. They need that extra push to make them work toward healing, the therapist plays a coaching role in their treatment.

One of the most recent developments in physical therapy is the emphasis on core strengthening and stability. The core of your body is like the foundation of your house. If you were to build your house on a weak foundation, you could risk damage and collapse. Similarly, bodies with a weak core are susceptible to acute injury and chronic overuse syndromes. Core strengthening emphasizes the muscles of the back and pelvis. Some exercise programs, especially pilates, are fantastic at increasing the bodies core stability.

Employees and employers need to realize the importance of physical therapy prescribed for their injured worker. It is an integral part of the treatment and recovery of their injured worker. Many companies require injured workers to go to physical therapy before or after their shift. HealthFirst Medical works with employers to try to schedule these appointments, but we only have so many of these appointments available. Your injured worker is probably on modified duty, and allowing him/her to take an hour for physical therapy will help them to return to full duty in a shorter period of time. If your employee is off on TTD and is prescribed physical therapy, you as the employer should insist on the employee keeping their physical therapy appointments, as they will be able to return to full duty sooner. We will notify you if your employee no shows or cancels for a physical therapy appointment. Please work with the insurance case manager to get your employee to these appointments so we can get them returned to full duty as soon as possible.

(Source: Workers Comp Resource Center, Reduce Your Work Comp)

Modified Work Programs: Good for All

A workplace injury can cause a number of complications for both employers and employees. In particular, challenges arise when the nature of the injury results in work restrictions. Some employers choose to accommodate these restrictions, while others do not or are simply unable to. Smaller, specialized businesses, especially, have more difficulty finding ways to keep an injured employee at work. In some cases, the employees are sent home until they recover enough to resume work. In 2013, one out of every four injuries involved Lost-Time, the average case requiring 8 days of missed work. Providing modified duty for injured workers has been proven to be a more beneficial alternative to sending them home. Employers can accommodate injured workers by assigning light duty, making work station modifications, or sending employees to modified duty programs like the one in the Wellness Center at HealthFirst.

A study published by the RAND Institute showed a 45% faster recovery time for employees who were placed in a modified duty program. The following are benefits of faster return-to-work times for employers *and* employees.

Premium savings: Worker's comp premiums are determined by the frequency and cost of injuries.

A faster recovery time means less medical bills, which means lower premiums.

Higher productivity: Getting the employee back to work allows you to pay an employee for being in the workplace contributing to the overall productivity of the company rather than sitting at home.

No training costs: Hiring and training a replacement to fill in for an injured employee costs time and money, and the new hire will not be as valuable as the more experienced worker. Keeping an employee at work or expediting their recovery could eliminate this cost.

Regular wages: Often, Lost-Time pay is less than the employee's normal wage, so getting them back to work faster ensures they won't face financial struggles.

Increased health: Employees in modified duty programs are more involved in their own recovery process, making them more likely to attend therapy appointments and put more effort into their exercises. It also helps mitigate the stress involved with threatened job security and their ability to return to work.

Professional development: Employees out of work for long periods can have difficulty maintaining their professional relationships with coworkers and may have to put their skill development on hold due to missed training sessions and lack of experience gained from being on the job. Quicker recovery times can lessen these effects.

Maintaining routine: The longer an employee is off work, the harder it is to re-establish and adhere to the routine of a normal workday. A faster recovery allows the employee to maintain the structure of a normal work day and return to work satisfied and productive.

In addition to these benefits, employees enrolled in specialized modified duty programs like the one at HealthFirst receive training and education on health, workplace safety, and preventing injuries, making them less likely to be reinjured. They are also able to perform their prescribed therapy on premises during work hours, resulting in less missed appointments and faster recovery time.

OSHA estimates that Lost-Time Injuries cost companies up to \$28,000 per case with Lost-Time Pay, production loss, medical expenses, case management, and other direct and indirect costs taken into account. Implementing a modified duty program for your injured employees can help you avoid the costly consequences of Lost-Time Injuries.

If you have any questions or would like more information on HealthFirst's modified duty program, please contact our Marketing Department at 562-565-6685.

Source: RAND Institute for Civil Justice, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
