



Differences between physical therapists and personal trainers

Some of the general public has a misconception of the role of a physical therapist versus the role of a personal trainer. This misconception may be a result of not understanding what a physical therapist does, or because of personal trainers going outside their scope of practice. Hopefully, this article can define the differences, so that everyone is seeing the most appropriate person for their condition.

Physical Therapist

A physical therapist is a state licensed healthcare provider that is educated at the Master's level in the evaluation and treatment of musculo-skeletal and neuromuscular disorders. These include simple sprains and strains to the neck, shoulder, elbow, chest, abdomen, mid-back, low back, hips, knees, ankles and feet. These disorders also include more complicated injuries as a result of a car accident, work related injury, any slip and fall, or any "simple" strain while working out. Physical therapy care also addresses surgical patients, prior to and after the surgery.

These treatments include a comprehensive evaluation to find the impairments and the underlying cause of the symptoms. After this evaluation, the therapist formulates a plan of care and goals that address the individual impairments and returns the patient to his previous functional level. The plan of care will include manual techniques and exercises performed by the patient. These exercises include stretches, strengthening, and stabilization.

Personal Trainers

A personal trainer is an individual that provides exercises to deconditioned people. These deconditioned people do not have lingering pain or injury that resulted from an accident a few months before. The people going to a personal trainer should be "out of shape" and want to be healthier.

Some of the trainers may have a college degree, and some may have a certification, but there is no state regulation for these trainers. Therefore, be very careful when deciding on a personal trainer. The personal trainer should perform an assessment on his clients, as well as goal setting. Part of the assessment should be asking about pain levels and previous injuries. No personal trainer should address any pain or injury.

How do you know if you should see a physical therapist or a personal trainer?

The answer is as easy as asking: Do I have pain or an injury? If the answer is "yes", you should see your physician and ask about physical therapy.