

## One step at a time: A physical therapist's guidelines for better "PT"

By Sonia Rapaport

**W**hen recovering from a serious injury, stroke, major surgery, or a debilitating condition, help is necessary to regain strength, coordination, and balance, in order to live your life as independently as possible. In recognition of National Physical Therapy Month, here are a few pointers about the many ways physical therapy can be of benefit, and how your physical therapist can work with you to provide optimal rehabilitation at home.

**Assess Safety** – First and foremost, your physical therapist will assess the safety of your home environment. This means ensuring that the space of your home is clear of obstruction and screened for falls risks—a safe recovery or rehab cannot be made in a danger zone!

**Do You Need a Mobility Device?** – Your physical therapist will then determine if a mobility device, such as a walker or cane, is needed to assist your recovery and provide you with additional support when necessary. Mobility devices can prevent falls and further injury, and can also be helpful in regaining strength, coordination, and independence.

**Develop a Care Plan** – A care plan based your personal goals will be developed to make certain that a clear line of communication is open, priorities are aligned, and rehabilitation is optimized.

**Instruct Proper Body Movement and Positioning** – Excessive strain on joints and muscles while rehabilitating can initiate further damage

and stunt the recovery process. Through physical therapy, you will be instructed on gait, learn how to conserve your energy, and teach you how to distribute your weight while moving and walking so that you'll have less pain and recover more steadily.

**Encourage Physical Activity** – A body in motion stays in motion! Keeping active is an essential part to recovery, and one of the most significant challenges that your physical therapist will help you overcome safely. Your physical therapist will develop exercise programs to target trouble areas, enhance balance and coordination, build up strength and stamina, and maintain muscle mass,

**Educate on Proper Care** – Your physical therapist will instruct you and your caregiver on proper around-the-clock rehabilitation, which will include introduction of an exercise schedule, a list of things to avoid, and what to do if additional assistance is needed. Appropriate and thorough information is just as vital as physical strength when it comes to healing.

**Observe Progress** – During each session, the therapist will monitor your progress and adjust your care plan. Close observation is key to proper care and full recovery. When undergoing physical therapy, it's natural to feel discouraged by challenge, or lack of independence, but observing your progress will show you how far you've come—one step at a time.

Sonia Rapaport is a physical therapist and rehabilitation instructor with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and its private pay affiliate Partners in Care.