

Physical Therapy is a Journey, Here Are Some Tips on Navigating the “Voyage”

By Sanjeev Sinha, Physical Therapist, VNS Health, Oct 17, 2023



HEALTH - As a physical therapist for the last 16+ years with the home health [nonprofit VNS Health](#), working in the Bronx, I’ve seen patients facing a myriad of challenges, from stroke survivors to cancer patients, to older adults recovering from falls and much more. But no matter what brings a patient to us, it always brings me joy to help patients become more independent in their homes after they are released from the hospital. Over the course of my career, I’ve often been asked about my favorite part of the job, and my response is always the same: there’s nothing better than seeing one of my former patients out for a walk. They’ll yell out to me by my nickname, “San!” when they see me going to visits in the neighborhood, and when I turn around those smiles are the best to see—it’s the smile of regained independence.

Our physical therapy team sees patients who are recovering from a wide variety of health concerns. Whether it’s a crippling injury, a stroke, a major surgery, or a debilitating condition, my colleagues and I provide the help that is necessary to regain strength, coordination, and balance.

My patients and I work together as a team to develop goals for recovery and create a plan of care that helps them build skills and confidence, they need to safely regain independence. It’s inspiring to see someone go from some of their toughest days to starting to feel independent again. And the impact of physical therapy goes beyond “physical” --as patients get their strength back, their mental health also significantly improves.

Working so closely with patients in their homes, it's not uncommon to form a close bond with them. Many of the patients I help live by themselves, and I may be the only person they see and speak with that day.. I’ve also found that when patients connect with their physical therapists and see them as part

of their support system, they tend to be more motivated to put in the hard work, which improves their outcomes. Also, on a practical level, being in the patient's home allows me to see what challenges their home poses...and we can discuss ways to make it easier to get around, through mobility aids, or focusing on specific exercises.

In recognition of National Physical Therapy Month, here are a few pointers about the many ways physical therapy can benefit you on your healing journey, and how your physical therapist can work with you to provide optimal rehabilitation at home.

Assess Safety

The very first thing I do when visiting a new patient is assess the safety of their home environment. This means ensuring that the home is clear of obstruction and screened for falls risks. A safe recovery cannot be made in a cluttered environment.

Adjust Equipment

For patients who use mobility equipment, we will work with them to ensure that they are properly adjusted. For example, if a walker is too short, the patient will have to hunch over to use it, which isn't ideal. And because mobility devices can prevent falls and further injury, and can also be helpful in regaining strength, coordination, and independence, it is important that it is the right fit.

Develop a Care Plan with Clear Goals

A care plan based on your personal goals will be developed to make certain that a clear line of communication is open, priorities are aligned, and rehabilitation is optimized. This way, we are moving toward the same destination.

Encourage Physical Activity

Movement is a "use it or lose it" skill, and there is no magic pill to regain strength. You have to put in the work. Keeping active is an essential part of recovery, and you will work with your physical therapist to develop exercise programs to target trouble areas, enhance balance and coordination, build up strength and stamina, and maintain muscle mass. Most importantly, this will be done safely and in a way that doesn't put excessive strain on the body.

Educate on Proper Care

Physical therapy doesn't end when your therapist leaves. With the goal of regaining independence, your physical therapist will teach you proper around-the-clock rehabilitation, which may include introduction of an exercise schedule, a list of things to avoid, and what to do if additional assistance is needed. In addition, family caregivers can play an important role in helping a patient, so educating them on care is just as important.

Track Progress, Adjust When Needed

With each session, your physical therapist will take note of your progress and assess whether your care plan needs to be rearranged or accelerated. 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.

Don't Give Up!

Physical therapy is tough for many, but physical therapists are here to help you regain function and find a way to move towards a healthy future. Staying motivated is half the challenge, but your PT will be by your side cheering you on, and there to help when you have setbacks.

For more information about VNS Health's Rehabilitation Services, which include physical therapy, speech pathology and occupational therapy, visit <https://www.vnshealth.org/home-care/rehabilitation-therapy/>.

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