

Healthy Living

Physical therapy helps people avoid surgery

Individuals who are dealing with injuries or chronic pain may seek relief in various ways. Surgery may seem like an inevitable outcome, but advances in medicine have led to more conservative solutions. Physical therapy is a powerful, non-invasive first-line treatment that is increasingly being recommended by health care professionals as a means to address a wide range of conditions.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, physical therapy is a health care specialty that helps restore movement, manage pain and improve physical function. Physical therapists undergo many years of schooling, during which they learn to employ targeted exercises, hands-on care, and patient education to help people heal after surgery, recover from injuries, or manage chronic health conditions.

By targeting structural mechanics, restoring tissue mobility, and addressing underlying movement dysfunctions, physical therapy frequently can resolve complex medical conditions without the risks, costs, and down time associated with surgery. Here are some of the conditions PT can address.

Bulging discs: Targeted exercises, such as mechanical traction and spinal extension maneuvers, can help centralize disc material away from compressed nerves, says the Jacksonville Orthopaedic Institute.

• **Spinal stenosis:** Strengthening of core and pelvic stability muscles can reduce loading on the spinal canal. Manual therapy will help restore joint mechanics to alleviate pain and other symptoms.

• **Degenerative disc disease:** Physical therapists can help strengthen deep postural stabilizer muscles to create internal support. This can help relieve mechanical stress on intervertebral discs that have worn out.

• **Soft tissue injuries:** Overuse injuries and tendon degradation can lead to pain that mimics conditions that require surgical repair. These may include achilles tendinopathy, plantar fasciitis, and carpal tunnel syndrome. PT may be an initial treatment option for these conditions.

• **Pelvic floor dysfunction:** The National Center for Biotechnology Information says pelvic floor dysfunction involves the abnormal activity or function of the pelvic floor musculature. Pelvic floor

dysfunction can affect bladder and bowel function and cause pain in the abdomen, including during intercourse. Physical therapy uses biofeedback, internal and external manual tech-

niques, and targeted neuromuscular retraining to strengthen the pelvic basket.

• **Joint osteoarthritis:** The Cleveland Clinic says osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis.

Braces are commonly worn by school-aged children. Estimates vary, but numerous sources suggest no fewer than 50 percent and as much as 70 percent of children get braces or seek treatment from an orthodontist prior to adulthood.

Braces are known to straighten teeth and make people more confident in their appearance, but the benefits of braces go beyond cosmetic enhancements. When considering whether or not to get braces, people should know that getting them can provide a host of long-term benefits.

• **Gum disease prevention:** Gum disease is caused when bacteria accumulates along the gum line. When that

occurs, people are vulnerable to infection and inflammation. Crooked or improperly spaced teeth can make certain areas inaccessible during routine brushing, and that can

make the mouth vulnerable to the buildup of plaque and bacteria. When that occurs, the gums can be affected by inflammation and infection that ultimately can cause gum disease. Braces help to straighten teeth and ensure proper spacing between them, which can help to prevent gum disease.

• **Reduced risk for cavities:** The buildup of bacteria on misaligned and poorly spaced teeth also can increase the risk for cavities. While it can be harder to clean teeth while wearing braces, the Cleveland Clinic notes that once the braces are off, the straighter teeth and more accessible spaces in the mouth help to prevent cavities.

• **Prevent the erosion of bone:** The Atlanta Center for Advanced Periodontics notes that misaligned teeth can cause dental bone loss. That's because misaligned teeth prevent normal chewing, which

results in a loss of stimulation to the bone. When that happens, the bone that holds teeth in place can break down. Braces help to ensure proper alignment of teeth, and over time that can help to prevent dental bone loss.

• **Braces and reduced risk for TMJ disorders:** The Mayo Clinic notes that the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) connects the jawbone to the skull. Disorders affecting the TMJ can cause pain in the jaw joint and in the muscles that control movement of the jaw. While the Mayo Clinic notes it can be difficult to pinpoint the

exact cause of a TMJ disorder, a misaligned bite can stress the jaw. That stress can potentially contribute to a TMJ disorder. Braces can help to address a misaligned bite, and over time that can reduce risk for a TMJ disorder.

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