

What is Manual Physical Therapy?

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Fischer Physical Therapy

The physical therapy profession constitutes a vast array of rehabilitative potentials. Manual physical therapy, often performed in outpatient orthopedic clinics, has great potential to be a highly skilled method of intervention for people struggling with pain and/or impaired function. By using the hands, forces are applied to dysfunctional regions of the body in an intelligent fashion. The applied therapeutic force is intent upon specifically affecting, directly or indirectly, these structures of the body responsible for the root of the problem that is often simply perceived as pain. Examples of this include: mobilizing a joint in the spine that is tight, releasing myofascial restrictions, restoring normal movement patterns and releasing abhorrent neurological tension or reflex activity. This results in restored function to one or more areas and removes the barrier to the body's amazing capacity to heal.

The term "manual therapy", for whatever reason, has poorly resonated with the public. It's common for this term to be equated to massage therapy, a type of manual intervention that most commonly addresses the skin, its underlying fascia, and outer muscle layer. The key word to emphasize regarding this distinction is "specificity." An effective manual therapist will examine specific structures within and throughout the body and assess their relationship to the pain and/or functional limitation as presented by the patient. That being said, there are other gifted therapists/practitioners within other professions who also have the capability to utilize their hands as instruments of healing.