



# health PRACTITIONERS

## Who do you turn to?

When you experience musculoskeletal pain, it can be difficult to figure out how to treat it. In addition to your primary health care provider (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner) physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, and athletic therapists are all trained to help treat pain. Who do you turn to?

**Registered Massage Therapists** are health practitioners who manipulate soft tissues such as muscles, tendons, and ligaments in order to relieve pain from an injury or a chronic health problem. You can see a massage therapist at any point in time, not only when you're in pain or discomfort. People who work in physically demanding jobs or who are very physically active can benefit from regular massages as they can prevent an injury from happening.

Registered Massage Therapists are regulated provincially and must meet certain education and training requirements. When seeking massage therapy, look for someone who has this title to ensure they're qualified.

Some extended health benefit plans will cover massage therapy if you're being treated by a Registered Massage Therapist. Most plans don't need a physician's referral, but check with your benefit provider before making an appointment.

**Physiotherapists** work to restore or maintain the strength and function of your body through exercise and treatment. While many people see a physiotherapist to correct an injury or relieve joint pain, they're also able to provide treatment for those with neurological problems (e.g., stroke, brain injury), as well as respiratory (e.g., difficulty breathing, asthma), and cardiovascular conditions (e.g., heart attack, coronary heart disease).

Physiotherapists hold a masters degree in physical therapy and must be registered with the regulatory board in their province or territory. A physiotherapist will display PT after their name, which shows they are registered in Canada.

A physician's referral isn't required to see a physiotherapist as they're primary health care providers. However, some health benefit plans might require a referral for reimbursement of costs. Contact your benefit provider for more information on your coverage.

**Chiropractors** are primary health care providers who specialize in treatment and preventive care for disorders related to the spine, pelvis, nervous system, and joints. Chiropractic therapy is hands-on and involves the manipulation of the joints to restore proper movement. Many people seek chiropractic treatment for pain or an injury. Others, like seniors, find that treatment helps them to maintain mobility and good range of motion.

A Doctor of Chiropractic has spent four years at an accredited school, and has logged at least 4 200 hours of clinical training. Chiropractors are regulated and licenced by their provincial regulatory college. They are one of the five health care professionals in Canada who can use the title "Doctor".

While your primary health care provider might refer you to a chiropractor, a referral isn't needed to see one. Most extended health care plans cover chiropractic treatments. Check with your plan to see if you're covered.

### Did you know?

Massage Therapists can specialize in different types of massage. Some focus on pregnancy, rehabilitation, or athletic massage. Find the right one for your needs.

**Did you know?** In Canada, the profession of physiotherapy started just as World War I was ending, when wounded soldiers returning home required therapy.



**Athletic Therapists** provide services related to the prevention, immediate care, and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal injuries. They usually work for a sports team, for the athletic department of universities and colleges, or in sports medicine clinics.

After completing a post-secondary degree at an accredited school, athletic therapists must complete an internship of 1200 hours under the direction of a Certified Athletic Therapist. A comprehensive practical and written exam must be passed. After successful completion of the exam, they receive the title Certified Athletic Therapist, designated by the letters CAT(C).

Athletic therapy is not a regulated medical profession at this time, but some insurance companies will cover treatment costs. While a health care

professional's referral isn't necessary to make an appointment, it might be required by your insurance company in order to claim the treatment. Check with your insurance provider before making an appointment.

**Did you know?** From the casual jogger to the frequent marathon runner, the goal of an athletic therapist is to help clients return to their active lifestyle and stay injury-free.



**Remember,** your primary health care provider should be your first line of defense if you're experiencing pain. Make an appointment to speak to them first and discuss your treatment options. They will be able to inform you of the appropriate steps to take to best treat your problem. It's also a good idea to see your primary health care provider first so they can keep your medical file up-to-date. This can help them track chronic problems down the road, if needed.



Musculoskeletal pain can make every day tasks difficult. It's important to see a primary health care provider early to avoid any long-term problems. Take care of any pain or injuries when they occur to get back to full health as soon as possible!

If you suffer a soft tissue injury (e.g., sprain, strain), the following steps are things you can do in the short-term to help with the healing process:

1. Stop the activity immediately to avoid further or more serious damage.
2. Follow the RICE guidelines:

**R**est to help protect the injury and allow the body time to heal.

**I**ce the injury to limit swelling. Leave ice on for 10 to 15 minutes and allow the skin to return to normal temperature before icing the area again.

**C**ompression helps limit swelling. Wrap the injured area in an elastic bandage (e.g., an ACE bandage), ensuring it's snug, but not too tight.

**E**levate the injury to reduce swelling by reducing blood flow to the area.

3. If the pain and swelling don't decrease after two days of RICE, make an appointment to see your primary health care provider.

#### References

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