

Sexual Involvement: Recognizing Appropriate and Inappropriate Touching

What do physiotherapists do?

Physiotherapists assess, treat and prevent physical problems, injuries and pain. They restore movement, function and health. When you see a physiotherapist you can expect that they will:

- Carry out an assessment of your condition
- Review and discuss what they learned during your assessment with you
- Develop a treatment plan that will meet your needs and goals
- Get your consent for treatment

Physiotherapy assessment and treatment is often hands-on and usually involves touching. The physiotherapist will want to look at how your body moves. You may be asked to remove some of your clothing to see your muscles, joints, posture and movement. The physiotherapist will give you privacy to change your clothes and provide you with a way to cover yourself if necessary. The physiotherapist may also need to feel how your muscles and body parts move. Touch is central to physiotherapy.

What is appropriate touching?

Physiotherapists use their hands to touch different body parts to assess and treat patients. When touching occurs as part of your therapy you can expect that:

- the physiotherapist will tell you what they're going to do and ask permission before touching you
- you'll be allowed to ask questions or express concerns
- you can ask that an activity be stopped at any time if you feel uneasy
- you can take back your consent or change your mind about the treatment at any time

What does the College do?

The College of Physiotherapists of Ontario is an organization (not an educational institution) that exists to protect the public interest and has rules called Standards that describe how physiotherapists are expected to behave to show that they are acting in the patient's best interest.

As a patient, if you have concerns about your treatment or are looking for more information about the kind of care physiotherapists provide, you can contact the College's Practice Advisor at 647-484-8800 or 1-800-583-5885 or at practiceadvice@collegept.org.

Patient-Therapist relationships

Physiotherapists are not allowed to have an intimate relationship with patients. This doesn't mean the physiotherapist cannot be friendly, but it does mean that the physiotherapist shouldn't develop an intimate relationship with you in or out of the place where they work, while you are a patient. Any form of sexual involvement could be defined as sexual abuse, even if you consent to the relationship. The College sees any form of sexual involvement as unacceptable.

What can a patient do if they are feeling uneasy during a therapy session?

1. Tell the physiotherapist to stop.
2. Ask the physiotherapist to explain what he or she is doing and why he or she is doing it.
3. Refuse to continue with the therapy if you feel uneasy.

What to do if you suspect sexual abuse

If you think that you or someone you know has been sexually abused by a physiotherapist, contact the College's Professional Conduct Director at: 416-591-3833 or 1-800-583-5885 ext. 233 or at investigations@collegept.org.

Don't assume that someone else will report the physiotherapist and don't worry if you are mistaken. It's important that the College investigates these situations.

Please know that it's not your fault. The physiotherapist is responsible for understanding and maintaining an appropriate, therapeutic relationship.

Tell someone you trust or contact the College immediately.

Funding for therapy and counselling related to sexual abuse

If you've been sexually abused by a physiotherapist you may be eligible for funding for therapy or counselling that is needed as a result. Contact us to learn more about funding for therapy and counselling related to sexual abuse.

The College provides service in English and French. However, we will do our best to make sure patients have access to information they require.

WWW.COLLEGEPT.ORG

Visit the website to learn more about the College, our services and how we can help.

College of Physiotherapists of Ontario
375 University Avenue, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M5G 2J5
416-591-3828 or 1-800-583-5885 | info@collegept.org

FACT SHEET