I’ve been referred to physical therapy. Now what?

You just left the doctor’s office with a script in hand to see a physical therapist for an injury or illness that’s preventing you from moving properly. Even though the physician shared some background information on the services, you have never been to physical therapy before and don’t know it all works. What’s the next step?

Select a Physical Therapist. Deciding where to go for physical therapy can be a daunting process but with a little guidance, you can easily find the best fit for you. Start by talking to friends and family members about where they’ve gone for physical therapy, ask your doctor for a few recommendations, and search online for locations in your community. Once you have compiled a short list of potential physical therapy clinics, call each location to request more information.

Narrow Down the Playing Field. Making an informed decision about your rehabilitation will ensure you find the best physical therapist for your specific condition. Conducting a quick phone interview of a potential rehab professional is the best way to know what to expect from physical therapy. Here are a few essential questions you should ask a physical therapy clinic:

- **What will a typical PT session involve?** Each physical therapy clinic conducts sessions just a little bit differently so it’s important to settle on a place with practice policies that make you comfortable. For example, you may want to choose a clinic that allows you to work with the same physical therapist each time, or to know whether your care is provided by a physical therapist or physical therapy assistant. Others may select a physical therapy clinic based on session length or whether manual therapy is performed.

- **What will be expected of me?** Each physical therapist will have slightly different expectations for the role you play in your own recovery. However, all will expect you to participate in a home program to carry over goals established in your therapy sessions.

- **How will you help me reach my potential?** You’ll want to be sure that the treatment philosophy of the physical therapist you select meshes with your needs. Just like expectations vary from one physical therapist to another, so does the approach.

- **What experience/training do you have in treating my injury/illness?** No matter what brings you to rehab, you’ll want to find a physical therapist who specializes in treating your specific circumstance. Physical therapists may specialize in neurologic or orthopedic conditions, for example, based on interests, experience, continuing education, and professional influences.

- **Do you accept my insurance?** Physical therapy is often covered by insurance but some locations may not accept your plan, or may not accept insurance at all. Asking in advance can save a lot of headaches down the road and is an opportunity to find out if you need to contact your insurance company before your first visit.

Prepare for the First Day. Having a clear sense of what to expect on the first day of rehab can help avoid any confusion and ensure a successful initial meeting. The clinic you have chosen will likely provide information on its website or over the phone but have these questions handy just in case:
What time should I arrive?
Where do I park/enter?
What should I wear to rehab?
What if I need to reschedule my appointment?

Asking a few questions in advance will ensure you settle on the right PT clinic to address your specific needs and position you for a successful recovery.