



# MOVING PART(NER)S

## Physiotherapists

Written By: Michaela Lay

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Whether you're new to the world of Parkinson disease or you've been on this journey for a while, you've probably come to learn that there are a whole lot of people who can help. Among these, a physiotherapist is essential. You might be thinking, “But wait a minute, I haven't been injured, what is a physiotherapist going to do?” Great question! Read on my friend.

Physiotherapists are a regulated profession and must be registered with a provincial regulatory body. Most physiotherapists do not require a referral, though some public health providers and/or clinics may require it. A physiotherapist helps people

with injuries, disabilities, and other concerns through exercise, manual therapy, and education. They support long-term function, safety, and quality of life in addition to assisting with improving or maintaining movement/mobility and strength.

### **Here's how a physiotherapist can make a meaningful difference for people with PD:**

Pain is a popular topic when people seek out our support at Parkinson Association of Alberta. People may experience joint discomfort, muscle



tightness, or dystonia—a painful cramping or twisting of muscles, often in the feet, hands, or neck. Physiotherapists may address pain through targeted stretching, strengthening, manual therapy, and posture correction to reduce discomfort and support better body mechanics. By relieving these physical stressors, they help restore confidence in everyday movement.

Parkinson's can also impact breathing, as the muscles involved in breathing may weaken or become less coordinated as the disease progresses. Physiotherapists incorporate breathing exercises into treatment plans to improve breath control, stamina, and postural support—essential for both activity and speech. For example, training in diaphragmatic breathing (big belly breaths) and breath pacing

can help reduce shortness of breath and fatigue during movement.

Most importantly, physiotherapists are experts in keeping people active and functional, allowing you to PUSH forward. Movement is medicine, use it or lose it, and motion is lotion are all common sayings in both Parkinson's AND aging in general. Regular physical activity helps slow motor decline, improve balance, and boost mood. A physiotherapist may design a personalized exercise program that matches an individual's stage of PD, mobility level, and goals. They can also assist with specific exercises to help keep you functional – things like improving range of motion to put on a jacket, bra, or shoes. Or increasing core strength to improve posture and decrease falls. Or lower body moves to help with walking or stairs.

### **Physiotherapists Support Care Partners Too**

Physiotherapists also provide vital education and support for care partners, who are often navigating daily tasks and providing physical assistance to loved ones with little or no formal training. A physiotherapist can guide you as a care partner on how to safely assist, lift, or transfer your loved one, which is essential to prevent injuries for both of you. They also offer guidance on how to promote movement and independence while respecting safety limits, reducing the risk of falls or over-dependence.

Additionally, physiotherapists can help identify the right mobility aids (like walkers or transfer chairs) and train both the person with Parkinson's and their care

partner on correct use. They may also suggest ways to build shared physical activity into the daily routine—so care partners and loved ones stay active together in a way that's safe, engaging, and sustainable.

Physiotherapists can be accessed through both public health and private business avenues. In the former, wait times may be longer, while the latter may be costly. Many private insurance plans offer some physiotherapy coverage.

Looking for a physiotherapist can be overwhelming with so many to choose from. In Alberta physiotherapists can have a specialty, but there isn't a formal, legislated designation system. Specialization is attained through additional training and demonstrated expertise in a particular area. It may be difficult to find a physiotherapist with significant Parkinson's knowledge; however, most physiotherapists will be able to support you regardless of specialisation. It's important to ask questions specific to your needs during your first assessment and it's okay to try a different practitioner if you don't "click" with the first one or if you don't feel your goals align.

Including a physiotherapist in your health care team can ensure that you get the help you need to keep moving, keep connecting, and keep living well. ■