



# PHYSICAL THERAPY TERMINOLOGY

Adapted from Various Sources

*Physical Therapy (PT) is a health care profession primarily concerned with the remediation of impairments and disabilities and the promotion of mobility, functional ability, quality of life and movement potential through examination, evaluation, diagnosis, and physical intervention carried out by physical therapists and physical therapy assistants.*

**Abduction:** a movement of a limb away from midline or the center of the body

**Adduction:** a movement of a limb toward midline or the center of the body

**Base of Support:** the weight-bearing surface of the body

**Bilateral:** pertaining to two sides of the body; both arms or both legs

**Cervical:** pertaining to the neck

**Core:** pertaining to the trunk, primarily abdominals, and back

**Dissociation:** to separate actions; moving one extremity/limb to perform a movement without the other extremity doing the same or similar movement at the same time

**Distal:** farthest from the center, from midline or from the trunk

**Dynamic:** pertaining to vital forces or inherent power; refers to the body in motion; opposite of stationary

**Extension:** a straightening action of a joint such as the neck, back, arms, legs, hands, feet, etc.

**External Rotation:** an outward turning of the limb away from the body

**Flexion:** a bending or forward movement of the spine or limbs

**Gait Training:** the act of learning how to walk

**Gross Motor:** movements of the large muscles of the body

**Gross Motor Skills:** coordinated body movements involving the large muscle groups; includes running, walking, hopping, climbing, throwing, and jumping

**Hamstrings:** a muscle group on the back of the thigh that can bend the knee and straighten the hip

**Hyperextension:** excessive movement in the direction of extension

**Hypermobility:** movement beyond normal range of motion

**Hypertonic:** muscle tone higher than normal; resistance to passive movement; in extreme form, spasticity

**Hypotonic:** muscle tone less than normal; floppy; low tone

**Internal Rotation:** an inward turning of the limb toward the body

**Instability:** the lack of firmness in weight-bearing; difficulty maintaining weight-bearing

**Kinesthesia:** the conscious awareness of joint position and body movement in space, such as knowing where to place one's feet when climbing stairs without visual cues



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**Long-sitting:** sitting with legs straight out in front

**Lumbar:** pertaining to the low back

**Midline:** a median line dividing the two halves of the body

**Motor Control:** the ability to regulate and monitor the motions of one's muscle group to work together harmoniously to perform movements

**Motor Coordination:** the ability of several muscles or muscle groups to work together harmoniously to perform movements

**Motor Planning:** the ability to conceive of, organize, sequence, and carry out an unfamiliar and complex body movement in a coordinated manner; a piece of praxis

**Muscle Tone:** the degree of tension normally present when one's muscles are relaxed, or in a resting state

**Prone:** a horizontal position of the body where the face is positioned downward

**Proximal:** nearest to the point of attachment or center of the body

**Quadriceps:** a large muscle group on the anterior/front surface of the thigh responsible for knee extension

**Range of Motion:** a measure of the amount of movement/motion available at any given joint of the body

**Reflex:** an involuntary/automatic response to a stimulus

**Ring Sitting:** sitting on the buttocks with legs forming a ring in front, not crossed

**Sacral:** the triangular-shaped bone below the lumbar spine formed, typically, by the fusion of 5 vertebrae

**Side-sitting:** sitting on one hip with legs flexed to the opposite side

**Static:** at rest; in equilibrium; not in motion

**Supine:** lying on the back, face up

**Symmetrical:** referring to symmetry of the body, whose right and left halves mirror each other

**Tailor-sitting:** buttocks on the floor with legs flexed and crossed; pretzel sitting

**Tall-kneeling:** weight-bearing on the knees with torso upright and extended

**Thoracic:** pertaining to or affecting the chest or upper back

**Unilateral:** affecting or occurring on only one side of the body

**Vestibular Stimulation:** stimulation of the vestibular apparatus (bones of the inner ear and canals) that provides information regarding acceleration and the position of the body in space

**Weight-bearing:** the ability of a part of the body to resist or support weight

**Weight shift:** translation or movement of body weight from one side to another, forward or back