



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