

Pain

Pain is one of the most common symptoms that may lead someone to seek the help of a physical therapist or other health care professional.

Pain is a completely individualized experience. We often use different terms to describe it, and it is hard to know if you feel pain the same way as your friends or family feel pain. Some people talk about having a high or low tolerance to pain, but because pain is such a subjective experience, science has not developed accurate ways to measure pain tolerance.

Currently, there are 2 ways your physical therapist may categorize your pain.

The most standard classification of pain is **time-based**:

- Acute (pain experienced for less than 3 months)
- Chronic (pain experienced for more than 3 months)

The second classification is based on the likely **triggering mechanism**:

- **Nociceptive** triggers result in pain that is localized to an area of injury or dysfunction. The pain is often aggravated or eased by certain movements or positions, which demonstrates that the pain has a clear mechanical nature.
- **Peripheral neuropathic**-induced pain occurs with a history of injury, disease, or mechanical compromise to a nerve.
- **Central sensitization** results in pain that is disproportionate to the nature or extent of the injury or disease. The pain is usually nonmechanical and unpredictable in response to factors that usually aggravate or decrease pain.

HOW A PHYSICAL THERAPIST CAN HELP

Once your condition has been diagnosed, your physical therapist will work with you to develop a treatment plan to help address your pain. Because the mechanisms of pain vary, each approach to care will also vary. Physical therapy treatments may include:

- **Manual therapy.** Manual therapy consists of specific, hands-on techniques that may be used to manipulate or mobilize your skin, bones, and soft tissues.
- **Movement and strengthening exercises.** Moving and exercising can often be a great strategy to lessen pain.
- **Modalities.** Your physical therapist will be able to determine whether the use of ice, heat, or electrical stimulation will benefit your unique condition.



In 2010, it was estimated that the United States spent between **\$500 billion** and **\$635 billion** on the treatment of pain.