

# HIV and Physical Therapy: What to Expect

## What is physical therapy?

Physical therapists work with people to

- Identify causes of difficulty with movement;
- Promote improved physical ability and function, wellness and fitness as it relates to movement and health;
- Prevent the onset or progression of impairments and disabilities resulting from disease, injuries, or other conditions.

## What physical therapy services would be beneficial to persons with HIV?

- Pain management / dealing with neuropathies
  - Physical Therapists help to educate patients about effective pain management strategies, and use stretching or strengthening exercises, joint mobilization, and physical agents, such as electrical stimulation to improve function and decrease pain.
- Strengthening
  - Potential effects of long term infection and some treatment regimens include loss of muscle strength and bulk.
  - In recent studies, exercise with weights has been shown effective in increasing strength in patients with HIV.
  - Physical therapists work with clients to set up appropriate programs, modify and adjust the programs based on the response and the client's medical status.
- Functional rehabilitation
  - Many individuals encounter increasing challenges in daily activities because of neuropathy, weakness, fatigue, etc.
  - Physical therapists identify strategies that address causes of the functional problem; for example, strengthening to improve walking or running abilities, and bracing and other techniques for a person with neuropathy who cannot move well.

## What to Expect?

- Individual assessment
- Therapist working individually with you to develop a treatment plan that works in your life
- Follow-up to modify and adjust the plan and to monitor response
- Coordination and communication with your physician and other health care providers

## Contacting a PT

The American Physical Therapy Association has an online database of members called "Find a PT" that you can use to locate a Physical Therapist in your area. Go to [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org) and click on the link for "Find a PT." Call the Physical Therapists in your area to see if they have experience treating HIV/AIDS patients.