

## **Physical Therapy's Scope of Practice Extends Beyond Aches and Pains**

Physical therapy is an obvious choice when you've sprained an ankle or developed tennis elbow, but what about when you need to boost your mood? Though highly skilled in methods that improve mobility and reduce pain following an injury, physical therapists can also play a key role in improving a patient's mental health.

Exercise, a core component of any physical therapy regimen, is known to benefit patients with mild to moderate mood disorders such as depression. Depression is an underlying condition often associated with chronic illnesses and orthopedic injuries that limit mobility and participation in daily activities. With depression affecting one in 10 Americans at some point in their lives, physical therapy is another avenue to diagnose and treat the associated symptoms.

Physical activity reduces feelings of anxiety, depression and stress by improving the patient's cognitive function and self-esteem. Moreover, studies have shown that aerobic exercise decreases overall tension levels, elevates and stabilizes mood and improves sleep. Because exercise's mind-altering effects are temporary, however, patients should work with a physical therapist to develop a regular exercise routine to ensure continued benefits.

Patients can expect to work closely with a physical therapist to develop a custom treatment plan based on a thorough assessment and detailed patient history. PTs are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression and identify the ways in which mental health disorders interfere with a person's ability to enjoy life. Each individual care plan includes some combination of flexibility, strength, coordination and balance exercises designed to achieve optimal physical function.

Physical therapists may be trained to identify and treat a wide range of movement disorders including sprains and strains but they're also adept at identifying and reducing symptoms of depression. Developing behaviors that maintain good mental health is an important part of overall health and wellness, and it's never too late to get started.