

Routine physical therapy visits can improve overall health for people of all ages

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When people think of physical therapy, they often associate it with rehabilitation from an injury or operation. But, increasingly, more people are incorporating annual visits to physical therapists into their wellness regimens to help them maintain movement and functionality.

[Tyra Mitchell](#), a doctor of physical therapy and professor of exercise science in the Tulane School of Professional Advancement's (Tulane SoPA) [kinesiology program](#), said the concept of routine physical therapy visits is becoming more mainstream. Some doctors are referring patients to physical therapists before they have problems with joints, mobility or balance.

"Physical therapists are trained to help people maintain a level of activity that they are happy with, whether that means taking a daily walk or being a weekend warrior who participates in physical exercise or activities a couple days out of the week. We cover the whole spectrum of human movement," Mitchell said. "It becomes more important as our bodies become wiser and a little older to have a full physical checkup to understand if issues need to be addressed. If a problem is identified, there are many things we can do to help the person before they have an injury, experience severe pain, or have limited motion."

During a routine physical therapy visit, Mitchell said the discussion will center on the person's current lifestyle and whether they have mobility problems that are limiting their activities. The physical therapist will assess all aspects of movement in a way that is individualized to a person's goals.

The visits can be especially helpful to people who have a sedentary lifestyle. Mitchell said many people often do not realize how many hours they spend sitting and not moving each week because of time spent sitting at workstations or driving around town for jobs, errands and more.

"I would certainly recommend a routine visit if you feel like you're not meeting your performance goals in life," she said. "Also, as we get older, things usually start to ache and your joints will speak to you. If that happens, it's good to check in with a physical therapist before it becomes a serious problem. We take measurements of a person's joints, strength and balance and that gives us a great indication of how someone is progressing over time."

The concept of regular physical therapy visits is also incorporated into the educational programming in Tulane SoPA's kinesiology program, which offers a bachelor's degree in exercise science, a bachelor's degree in health and wellness, a master's degree in sport studies, and a certificate in sports medicine.

Mitchell said students at Tulane SoPA benefit from faculty who also have ongoing real-world experience as personal trainers, coaches, physical therapists and more. In

addition to their comprehensive coursework, professors are able to share examples and case studies from their own work to enhance students' understanding of concepts.

"When you speak about some of these issues in the abstract, it can be harder to grasp," said Mitchell. "I love the fact that I've observed our faculty talk about real-life examples and what students can expect in the industry. You can take so many routes with these degrees, so it's great to introduce students to those avenues in the profession."

For those looking for at-home ways to improve their mobility, Mitchell suggests having a workspace that supports good posture to prevent problems with a person's neck, back and arms. Also, staying hydrated with lots of water will help muscles move better and improve overall health. Lastly, incorporating even small pockets of movement into daily routines can have long-term benefits.

"You don't need to make a big deal about it. You can walk while you're on a phone call or during a lunch break. You can do a few squats when you have a few minutes between meetings," she said. "It's all about integrating easy movements into your life each day. If you supplement that with an annual physical therapy visit, you'll be able to stay right on target with your goals."

For more information on the kinesiology program at Tulane SoPA, visit sopa.tulane.edu/kine.