

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (Physiatry)

What is a physiatrist?

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physicians, also called physiatrists, diagnose the cause of pain, and develop a comprehensive treatment plan. They have broad medical expertise to help patients with a range of pain-causing conditions that can occur at any age.

What does a physiatrist do?

Many issues can cause pain, like injury, illness, or medical conditions such as those related to the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, and muscular system. A physiatrist can identify what's causing pain and help a person manage and treat the issue, with the goal of recovering mobility and functional well-being.

To do this, the physiatrist focuses on the whole body — not just a single problem area — and assembles a treatment team to optimize care and recovery, which can include:

- Physical therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Primary care physicians
- Neurologists
- Orthopedic surgeons

A physiatrist's treatment plan is very specific to an individual patient. Depending on the root of the problem, a physiatrist may focus on:

- **Neurorehabilitation:** treating pain or mobility issues from a spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, or stroke
- **Pain medicine:** for pain management
- **Musculoskeletal care:** including symptoms of autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis
- **Sports injuries:** like tendonitis, stress fractures, and concussions

- **Post-operative care:** often necessary for joint replacement, organ transplant, and heart surgery

What to expect with a physiatrist:

With their broad training, physiatrists provide general medical treatment to treat pain and prevent further disability. At the first appointment, the doctor will speak to the patient about their medical and family history to learn more about what may be causing a problem.

If a diagnosis is needed, the doctor may run tests like X-rays, nerve conduction studies (NCS), and electromyography (EMG) to identify the cause of a problem, informing the next steps for a recovery plan.

Physiatrists also offer in-office injections including:

- Joint and trigger point injections to treat pain-causing bone and soft tissue disorders
- Injections that treat central nervous system-related pain
- Spinal therapeutics that can relieve back pain