

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Physiotherapy: New Approaches in Treating Physical and Psychological Symptoms

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## Introduction

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating mental health condition that often arises after an individual experiences a traumatic event, leading to symptoms such as flashbacks, hypervigilance, emotional numbness, and avoidance. While PTSD is traditionally treated through psychological interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or medication, recent research highlights the importance of addressing the physical manifestations of the disorder. Many individuals with PTSD experience physical symptoms such as chronic pain, muscle tension, and impaired motor function, which can exacerbate the psychological distress they face. Physiotherapy is emerging as a valuable adjunct to traditional PTSD treatment by targeting these physical symptoms and promoting overall well-being. Recent studies have shown that combining physical therapy with psychological treatment helps break the cycle of pain and stress that is common in PTSD patients. Techniques like breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and movement therapy can help reduce physical tension, improve postural control, and regulate the autonomic nervous system, which is often dysregulated in PTSD. By integrating physiotherapy into the treatment plan, patients are provided with holistic care that addresses both the mind and body simultaneously, leading to more effective outcomes. [1]

The connection between physical symptoms and PTSD is complex, with evidence suggesting that trauma can manifest not only as emotional and psychological disturbances but also as somatic issues. PTSD often leads to an overactive fight-or-flight response, causing prolonged muscle tension, increased heart rate, and heightened sensitivity to pain. As such, the body of a person with PTSD remains in a state of hyperarousal, which can result in musculoskeletal pain, poor posture, chronic headaches, and fatigue. These physical issues further contribute to the mental health symptoms, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. In this context, physiotherapy offers interventions that not only address the physical manifestations of trauma but also regulate autonomic function, which can help reduce the psychological symptoms. Techniques like manual therapy, biofeedback, and mindfulness-based movement practices (e.g., yoga or tai chi) have shown promise in helping PTSD patients regain a sense of control over their bodies, reducing muscle tension and improving circulation. This approach helps patients manage both their physical pain and emotional distress more effectively, offering a dual benefit that is not always possible with psychological treatments alone. [2]

## Description

One of the primary ways physiotherapy addresses the physical symptoms of PTSD is through manual therapy and soft tissue techniques. Many individuals with PTSD experience chronic muscle tension, especially in the neck, shoulders, and lower back. These muscle groups often become tight

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and tender due to the body's prolonged response to stress. Manual therapy, such as myofascial release or trigger point therapy, can target these areas of tension, helping to reduce discomfort and restore normal muscle function. By manually releasing fascial adhesions and relieving muscle tightness, physiotherapists can provide immediate relief for physical pain, which in turn helps reduce overall stress and anxiety. Additionally, joint mobilization and postural re-education can improve alignment, further contributing to the reduction of pain and tension. As patients experience relief from physical symptoms, they may also find it easier to engage in cognitive and emotional processing, making it easier for them to work through the psychological aspects of their PTSD. This integration of physical and psychological healing creates a more comprehensive approach to recovery, addressing both aspects of the disorder that can hinder progress.

## Conclusion

The integration of physiotherapy into the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) represents a significant shift toward a more holistic and comprehensive approach to care. While traditional therapies focus primarily on the psychological aspects of trauma, physiotherapy offers essential interventions that address the physical manifestations of PTSD, such as muscle tension, chronic pain, and poor posture. Techniques like manual therapy, breathing exercises, and movement therapies provide effective means of reducing the physical symptoms of trauma while also helping to regulate the body's stress response, contributing to overall mental health improvement.

By combining physical rehabilitation with psychological therapies, patients benefit from a dual approach that promotes healing and recovery on both emotional and physical levels. The incorporation of physiotherapy in PTSD treatment is particularly valuable for patients whose trauma manifests as chronic physical symptoms, or for those who struggle with the autonomic dysregulation typical of PTSD. In addition to offering physical relief, physiotherapy can improve body awareness, reduce anxiety, and foster a sense of empowerment, which helps patients regain control over their bodies and emotions. As research into the benefits of physiotherapy in PTSD continues to grow, it is clear that this integrative approach holds great promise for improving patient outcomes. By addressing the interconnected physical and psychological aspects of trauma, physiotherapy offers a comprehensive treatment model that enhances recovery, reduces the impact of PTSD symptoms, and improves overall quality of life for affected individuals. The future of PTSD treatment lies in this multi-disciplinary collaboration, combining the expertise of physiotherapists, psychologists, and other healthcare providers to offer a more complete path to healing and recovery.

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