

Promoting the Use of Self-Management Strategies for People with Persistent Musculoskeletal Disorders: The Role of Physical Therapists

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Persistent musculoskeletal pain is a worldwide health problem resulting in negative effects on individuals' wellbeing and substantial costs to society. Musculoskeletal disorders are often work related and a considerable problem in the workplace—they lead to human suffering, lost time due to sickness absence, and reduced work productivity (presenteeism).

Musculoskeletal disorders often have a multifactorial origin and are influenced by multifactorial risk factors, including biomechanical, psychosocial, and individual characteristics.



A person-centered approach that focuses on self-management and a healthy lifestyle is important to restore and maintain function, to improve participation in the long term, and to provide a management plan instead of a cure.



Self-management is defined as “the ability to manage the symptoms, treatment, physical and psychosocial consequences, and lifestyle changes inherent in living with a chronic condition”. (Barlow et al., 2002)

Effective self-management is based on skills to actively participate in, and take responsibility for, persistent conditions. Essential self-management skills include problem solving, decision making, resource utilization, action planning, self-tailoring, self-monitoring, and creating a patient-health professional partnership.

With their expertise in musculoskeletal disorders and the duration of patient contact, physical therapists are ideally positioned to support people with persistent musculoskeletal disorders in their self-management.



- To facilitate effective self-management:
- (1) Help the patient to identify his or her barriers and goals
 - (2) Assist in identifying optimal strategies through problem solving
 - (3) Support the patient to identify ways to measure the effectiveness of self-management

Physical therapists can provide self-management support that can lead to enhanced self-management skills, self-management behavior, and long-term management of the musculoskeletal disorder.

