

The role of physiotherapy in trauma rehabilitation



International Organization of
Physical Therapy in Mental Health

What is trauma?

Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing event or series of events, such as abuse, a bad accident, rape or other sexual violence, combat, or a natural disaster. Trauma can be either acute or chronic:

Acute emotional trauma is the emotional response that happens during and shortly after a single distressing event.

Chronic emotional trauma is a long-term emotional response a person experiences from prolonged or repeated distressing events.

Exposure to any form of trauma, particularly in childhood, can increase the risk of mental illness and suicide; smoking, alcohol and substance abuse; chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and cancer; and social problems such as poverty, crime and violence.



Symptoms of trauma can be both emotional and physical. This can impact a person in terms of attitude, behaviour and functioning. Symptoms can include:



anger



social withdrawal



body aches or
pains



depression or anxiety



loss of interest in
activities



difficulty sleeping



guilt or shame



increased heart rate



fatigue

How can physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapists in mental health use physical oriented approaches to achieve personal lifestyle modifications that are relevant and sustainable. These strategies empower individuals towards greater independence and self-management of personal health and wellbeing.

Physiotherapists will address the individual physical and mental health needs of people using:



physical activity



relaxation



body awareness



exercise



movement



massage therapy