



Glossary of commonly used Physical Therapy terms

Abduction - A movement of a limb away from midline or the center of the body

Adduction - A movement of a limb toward midline or the center of the body

Ataxia - Muscular incoordination especially manifested when voluntary muscular movements are attempted

Base of support - The weight-bearing surface of the body. For example: in standing = the feet

Bilateral - Pertaining to two sides of the body, as in: both arms or both legs

Calcaneal Valgum - Angling of the heel of the foot outward, thereby flattening the arch of the foot

Calcaneal Varum - Angling of the heel of the foot inward, thereby increasing or heightening the arch of the foot

Cervical - Pertaining to the neck

Core - Pertaining to the trunk (primarily abdominals and back)

Dissociation - To separate. For example: one extremity/limb performs a movement without the other extremity doing the same or similar movement at the same time

Distal - Farthest from the center, from midline or from the trunk

Dynamic - Pertaining to vital forces or inherent power; refers to the body in motion; opposite of stationary

Extension - A straightening or backward movement of the spine or limbs

External rotation - An outward turning of the limb away from the body

Flexion - A bending or forward movement of the spine or limbs

Genu Valgum - Angling of the knees inward as in "knock kneed"

Genu Varum - Angling of the knees outward as in "bow legged"

Gross Motor - Refers to movement of large muscle groups

Hamstrings - A muscle group on the back of the thigh that can bend/flex the knee and straighten/extend the hip

Hyperextension - Excessive movement in the direction of extension

Hypermobility - Movement beyond normal range of motion

Hypertonic - Muscle tone higher than normal; resistance to passive movement; in extreme form = spasticity

Hypotonic - Less than normal tone; floppy

Internal rotation - An inward turning of the limb toward the body

Instability - Lack of firmness in weight-bearing. Difficulty maintaining weight bearing

Kinesthesia - Conscious awareness (perception) of body movement (direction and speed), detected by joints

Kyphosis - An increased convexity in the curvature of the thoracic spine (hunchback)

Long-sitting - Sitting with legs straight out in front

Lordosis - An anterior/forward curvature of the lumbar and cervical vertebrae (spine). An increase is often referred to as “sway-back”

Lumbar - Pertaining to the low back

Midline - The theoretical lines that divide the body into two equal halves vertically or horizontally

Motor Control - The ability of the Central Nervous System to regulate or direct the musculoskeletal system in a purposeful act

Motor Planning - The ability to organize and perform movement in a meaningful manner

Obliquity - A slanting

Pes Planus - Flat feet

Prone - Lying on the belly, face down

Proprioception - The awareness of posture, movement, changes in equilibrium, and the knowledge of position, weight, and resistance of objects in relation to the body. Sensed by muscles, tendons, and soft tissue

Proximal - Nearest to the point of attachment or center of the body

Quadriceps - A large muscle group on the anterior/front surface of the thigh responsible for knee extension

Range of Motion - A measure of the amount of movement/motion available at any given joint of the body

Recurvatum - A backward bending, frequently referring to the knees

Reflex - An involuntary/automatic response to a stimulus

Ring Sitting - Sitting on the buttocks with legs forming a ring in front (not crossed)

Sacral - The triangular-shaped bone below the lumbar spine formed, typically, by the fusion of 5 vertebrae

Side-sitting - Sitting on one hip with legs flexed to the opposite side

Spasticity - Hypertension of muscles causing stiff and awkward movements

Static - At rest; in equilibrium; not in motion

Supine - Lying on the back, face up

Symmetrical - Referring to symmetry of the body, whose right and left halves are mirror images of each other

Tactile Defensiveness - A negative response or increased sensitivity to touch

Tailor-sitting - Buttocks on the floor with legs flexed and crossed (“pretzel sitting”)

Thoracic - Pertaining to or affecting the chest or upper back

Tone (muscle) - The degree of tension normally present in the resting state of a muscle

Unilateral - Affecting or occurring on only one side of the body

Vestibular Stimulation - Stimulation of the vestibular apparatus (bones of the inner ear and canals) that provides information regarding acceleration and the position of the body in space

Weight shift - Translation or movement of body weight from one side to another, forward or back