

What kinds of physical therapy and rehabilitation are available for my elderly mother?

Mimi Jacobs

When we think of “rehabilitation,” we are generally referring to physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy.

Physical therapy is treatment that focuses on improving a person's function, whether it's related to bones, joints, muscles or nerves. Typically, a person's function has been impaired in some manner as a result of an injury, wear and tear, or as part of the aging process. When treating geriatric patients, physical therapists most often treat functional problems such as pain, balance issues, poor endurance, trouble walking and poor muscle strength. They also provide patients with therapeutic programs to retain strength.

Occupational therapy is treatment that focuses on helping a person achieve independence in his or her day-to-day life. Within the geriatric population, occupational therapists typically focus on a person's bathing, dressing, and grooming abilities. Occupational therapists are trained to identify problems in these areas and make recommendations for improvement. At times, equipment recommendations are made including rolling walkers, tub benches, commodes and adaptive eating utensils.

Speech therapy (Speech-Language Pathology) is treatment that focuses on improving a person's ability to communicate effectively and eat safely. Within the geriatric population, Speech-Language Pathologists typically focus on speech, language, voice, cognition, and swallowing. It is their job to identify a problem in these areas and provide treatment to enhance a person's ability to communicate with family, friends, and doctors, as well as make safe, competent decisions. Speech-Language Pathologists are also skilled specialists in identifying and treating swallowing difficulties that otherwise may go unrecognized.

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