

# How to choose a physiotherapist

What a session should cost, how to use the five subsidised Medicare sessions, and why a good physio discharges you

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Physiotherapy has the strongest evidence base of any hands-on therapy, which is exactly why the honest version of it often ends sooner than you expect. The mark of a good physiotherapist is not how long they keep treating you but how quickly they hand the work back to you.

## What it should cost

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An initial consultation, which is longer, usually runs about \$90 to \$170; follow-up sessions about \$70 to \$130. Complex or sports cases and hospital-based clinics sit at the top of those ranges.

Chronic conditions can qualify for up to five subsidised sessions per calendar year through a GP Management Plan and Team Care Arrangements. Medicare rebates a set amount per session - currently a little over \$50 - and you pay the difference. Private health extras covers part of the rest and HICAPS lets you claim the gap on the spot. A physio who insists on a long pre-paid package of ten or twenty visits is selling you something the evidence does not support.

## What the law requires

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Physiotherapist is a protected title. Practitioners must be registered with the Physiotherapy Board of Australia under AHPRA, which confirms their qualification, insurance and adherence to the shared code of conduct. Check the public register.

Registration sets a scope of practice: a physiotherapist can assess, diagnose and treat, but cannot prescribe medicines or order all imaging independently. When a physio says you need an X-ray or a referral, it should be arranged through your GP.

## Red flags

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A package of ten or more pre-paid visits sold before any assessment.

No home exercise programme or written plan.

Passive treatment only - machines and massage every visit with nothing you do yourself.

No objective measure of progress across visits.

Pressure to keep attending after the problem has resolved.

No registration number offered, or a refusal to be checked.

## What good looks like

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A working diagnosis and a written plan with a review date.

A clear home programme you are expected to do, not just receive treatment.

They measure progress objectively - range, strength, function - not just ask how it feels.

They discharge you when you are better and tell you what to do if it returns.

They refer on promptly when physiotherapy is not the right answer.

## What to ask

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- "What is the diagnosis, and what is the plan and expected timeline?"
- "How many sessions do you expect this to take, and how will we know it is working?"
- "What will I do between sessions, and can I get that in writing?"
- "Are you registered with the Physiotherapy Board of Australia?"
- "Can we use a GP Management Plan if this is a chronic problem?"
- "Do you have HICAPS, and what will my gap be?"
- "When would you refer me on - to a specialist, or for imaging?"

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