

Physiotherapy for Tree Planters: Frequently Asked Questions

A physiotherapist's knowledge and skill can be helpful when it comes to managing many common tree planting injuries, including soft-tissue injuries resulting from sprains and strains.

Recently, both employers and workers asked us how WorkSafeBC supports and/or accepts physiotherapy, in terms of injury prevention, claims management, and return to work programs. Here are our responses which you may find helpful.

How can physiotherapy help reduce injury claims?

Physiotherapists offer a wide variety of services ranging from preventative education and consultation, to injury diagnosis and treatment. It's important to be clear about the service you are asking for or receiving, to understand how it fits into the claims model.

Proactive measures like prevention education and consulting services are great ways to learn about avoiding injury in the first place. These types of voluntary services are at the discretion of and paid for by the employer or worker.

WorkSafeBC considers physiotherapists to be an important part of the injury management team. When it comes to injury assessment and treatment (including early intervention), steps should be taken to ensure services are properly engaged, to avoid confusion about what is covered by WorkSafeBC.

Can a worker who is injured at work go directly to a physiotherapist, or does the worker need to see a doctor first?

An injured worker can see a physiotherapist for an Initial Assessment without being referred by a doctor first, as long as he or she has a claim

number. Workers with "pending" claims (where there hasn't yet been a decision) can receive an Initial Assessment while those with "accepted" claims may receive ongoing treatment. However, in some cases it may be important to see a doctor first.

When should a worker see a doctor and not go directly to physiotherapy?

More complicated conditions should be diagnosed and treated by a doctor first. In cases where a worker has significant pain (especially if it's getting worse) or restricted mobility, a possible infection (such as infected joint or bursa or cellulitis), or any underlying health conditions, seeing a doctor first is recommended.

What is the best way to get a claim number?

The fastest way for workers to get a claim number is to call the Teleclaim Contact Centre at 1.888.967.5377 and report their injury. A claim number will be required by the physiotherapists prior to the initial session. Alternatively, the Employer's Report of Injury or Occupational Disease (Form 7) can generate a claim number, but the processing time will be slower. Workplace injuries that result in physiotherapy treatment must be reported to WorkSafeBC.

Tip

If you are a worker calling in to register a claim in order to access physiotherapy, tell the representative that you require a claim number for medical treatment.

Can a worker choose to see any physiotherapist?

Yes, but in order for physiotherapy to be covered by WorkSafeBC, the physiotherapist must be part of our contracted physiotherapy network, which can be found on worksafebc.com.

With an accepted claim, can a worker see a non-contracted physiotherapist?

Yes, but the worker will have to pay privately for treatment and seek reimbursement from WorkSafeBC. Note that WorkSafeBC's reimbursement rate is typically lower than that charged by a private clinic, and costs may not be fully reimbursed.

If a worker goes directly to a physiotherapist for treatment of a work-related injury, will they be reimbursed after the fact?

The worker will have to pay privately and, as above, treatment might be reimbursed, but it is not guaranteed. It depends whether the claim is accepted.

If a doctor reports that a worker should “take 2 weeks off work” without further detail, can physiotherapy treatment still be provided? Would that then be accepted as part of the claim?

As long as the claim is accepted and the worker attends physiotherapy within 60 days of the injury (and the WorkSafeBC claims representative hasn't stated otherwise), physiotherapy treatment can be provided. If a claim is only registered and acceptance is pending, the worker could still have an Initial Assessment done.



How is the first aid attendant involved in this process?

Occupational First Aid Attendants (OFAs) are encouraged to play an active role in a firm's return to work program. This may include additional training and consultation from a qualified physiotherapist. Even in consultation with a physiotherapist, OFAs must adhere to the Terms and Conditions of certification. This includes determining whether a worker should be referred to a doctor or qualified practitioner, in accordance with the criteria outlined in their occupational first aid training.

What is Direct Access Physio (“DAP”)?

This is a new physiotherapy program being piloted by WorkSafeBC for certain specific situations, and it's different from what is discussed here. Workers requiring access to physiotherapy services can use the model outlined above.

Initiating your physiotherapy treatment

If you are a worker who has reported a work-related injury to your employer, and you're seeking physiotherapy treatment:

- 1. Phone the Teleclaim Contact Centre at 1.888.967.5377 to register your claim.**
- 2. Visit worksafebc.com to find out who the local WorkSafeBC-contracted physiotherapists are in your area.**
- 3. Bring your claim number with you to your appointment.**
- 4. Keep in regular touch with WorkSafeBC about the status of your claim.**

Keep in mind that not all injuries are appropriate for, or respond well to physiotherapy. In many cases, a doctor should be involved, and it will be up to a WorkSafeBC claims team to make that determination.