

## How important is frequency of therapy?

by Kurt Gengenbacher, PT, DPT, OCS, SCS, CSCS

What physical therapists have long suspected regarding the relationship between success in rehabilitation and commitment to attendance has been documented. Those that attend early, defined as within 14 days after receiving the referral, have lower overall healthcare costs. Along with this, attending physical therapy sessions more regularly within a week leads to greater success rates. In short, when your physician recommends physical therapy, you should get started right away and commit to attending regularly.



In 2012, Julie Fritz and colleagues reported on the benefit of early care initiation, specifically related to low back pain. They found that starting physical therapy within 14 days of receiving a referral led to decreased healthcare costs. They examined individuals with low back pain and tracked the amount of time it took for them to start physical therapy. Individuals who initiated therapy within the first two weeks had decreased healthcare costs, as well as a decreased risk of advanced imaging, additional physician visits, surgery, injections and opioid medication prescription.

Additionally, a 2017 research study published in the *American Physical Therapy Association's Orthopaedic Practice Journal* confirmed that more frequent attendance leads to greater success. The researchers analyzed 669 cases and looked at cancellation rates, overall number of visits, average visits per week, overall number of weeks in treatment, amount of co-pay, and therapist experience, among other items. The group defined success at discharge as having met three criteria: "the patient's condition improved to his or her satisfaction, all short-and/or long-term goals were achieved, and discharge was agreeable between patient and clinician." The only thing measured that led to any significant change in likelihood of success was the average number of visits per week. They found that those individuals seen less than 1.67 visits per week on average had a 64.14 percent success rate, where those seen 1.68 times or greater per week realized a 93.06 percent success rate.

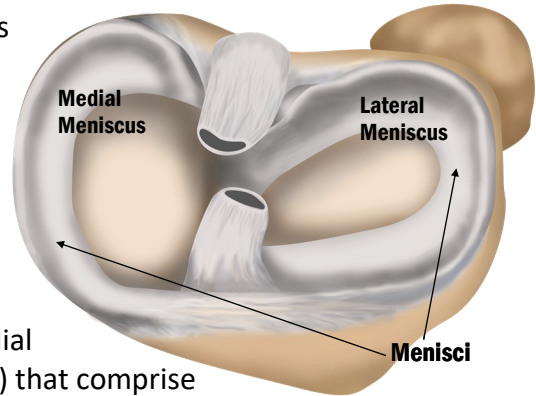
This said, the medical community knows life does not slow down because of an injury. If you have scheduling issues, or are concerned about mounting costs related to co-pays or insurance limitations, discuss this with your physical therapist to see how your visit frequency can be adjusted yet still allow for optimal benefit. One thing that will help is the regular use of a prescribed home exercise program. These exercises parallel what you are doing at your physical therapy visits.

Another factor to consider when assessing the impact and importance of physical therapy is whether you recently had surgery. The surgical procedure is often just the first step in returning to your normal lifestyle. Physical therapy is critical in your recovery process and helping to restore your mobility, strength and flexibility. In order to ensure you are strong enough to perform functional tasks, your physical therapist will use guidelines provided by your surgeon, as well as the surgeon's feedback, to help determine when you need to push forward and when to pull back. Surgery only fixes the injury. It takes your dedication to completing the necessary physical therapy to help ensure the best possible recovery outcome.

## Meniscus root tear, a well known injury, suddenly getting a lot of attention

With fall's arrival comes the beginning of sports such as cross-country, football and field hockey. Unfortunately, one knee injury common to all is a meniscal tear. Actually, there has been a lot of research and treatment focused on meniscal root tears.

A meniscus is a C-shaped fibrocartilaginous structure in the knee that sits between the leg bone (tibia) and the thigh bone (femur). There are two in each knee—a medial meniscus (inner side) and a lateral meniscus (outer side) that comprise the knee menisci. Each meniscus has an anterior and a posterior root which serves to anchor it to the tibia. The menisci act to absorb the forces between the femur and the tibia and to distribute these forces over a large surface area. Additionally, the menisci assist in the stabilization of the knee and trap synovial joint fluid which provides nutrition and lubrication for the cartilage surface of the knee. They become less elastic overtime, more susceptible to injury, and may tear. Specifically, the inner meniscus (medial meniscus) is injured the most often, as this portion of the meniscus absorbs the majority of the force applied in the knee. When a meniscal root tears, the meniscus is no longer attached to the tibia and therefore the meniscus loses its function. This can mechanically result in increased forces on the cartilage and rapid degeneration of the cartilage surface, leading to osteoarthritis.



There are two causes of meniscal root tears: an acute injury, or a chronic injury. In an acute injury, the root tears due to a traumatic incident, such as a fall or a blow to the knee. In the chronic setting, the root tears due to a chronic ailment, such as degenerative arthritis. These injuries due to a chronic condition are usually found in older patients, and they do not respond to repair as well as tears that occur due to an acute cause.

Common signs and symptoms of meniscal root tears include pain when standing on the affected leg and/or squatting along with tenderness along the joint of the knee. Additionally, this injury is associated with swelling of the affected knee (usually starting one to two days after the injury has occurred), locking or catching of the knee joint, and buckling of the knee. An MRI is required in order to diagnose a meniscal root tear. For chronic tears, non-operative treatment is recommended.

Crutches may be recommended in order to minimize the force on the injured knee. Additionally, range-of-motion exercises, stretching, and strengthening exercises may be carried out at home, although referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be recommended.

*Continued on page 8*