

## Physical therapists aid patients

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Favorable fall **weather** can lead many normally inactive people to begin or resume activities like walking, biking, tennis, jogging and even swimming.

And those who make a habit of such actions are tempted to overdo.

Members of both groups often get to know Kelly Ortego, MPT, physical therapy **director** at LaBorde Therapy Center.

"People who are not athletes start to feel good, and they want to do more," she said. "That can lead to **flexibility** issues when they're not properly stretched and they haven't strengthened the muscles around their joints, like the knees and ankles."

It is no surprise to find Physical Therapy Awareness Month in October, when conditions are so tempting. If mishaps occur, therapists are there to provide pain management, help the patient regain motion and gain strength.

"Our goal is to get them right back to their lifestyle," Ortego said. "We go over the reason it happened, and fix it."

Ortego, who is active in running, working out, horseback riding, tennis, golf and snow skiing, says she can practically feel her patients' pain and knows why the ache happened.

"I'm big on manual therapy," she said. "I want to make them better. The more I practice, the more I love it. I get as much as I give. I want to take patients to the next level — to not only make the pain better but promote a healthier lifestyle."

That latter notion is behind the American Physical Therapy Association offering "Smart Moves for Families" to encourage active lifestyles for all ages. There, too, Ortego suggests good sense.

"The first thing I'd say is to ease into it," she said. "Walk a block instead of three miles. Stretch, especially your hamstrings and calves, and wear proper footwear. It can make a huge difference."

There are times, of course, when life itself lands patients in therapy. Ortego patient Alyson Pharr was receiving occupational therapy for a work-related injury to her left arm, then got in an **auto** accident last April that damaged her right ankle.

"No bones were broken; they said it was a Grade 3 sprain," Pharr said. "We got the ankle back strong, but there were issues with swelling. We got an MRI, and the whole time, I had a ruptured ligament. Kelly realized my **mechanics** were wrong, and that I was compensating for it."

Pharr is continuing to strengthen the joint while contemplating another possible surgery.

"I walk a lot, ride bikes and play with two young kids in the yard," she said. "This has allowed me to get back to that, even with the ligament in the shape it's in."

Pharr advised listening to your therapist and keeping lines of communication open.

"You have to be committed to it," she said. "Come prepared to also be patient. If you're patient and do the work, you'll get results. I've strengthened my whole body, not just my ankle, and I learn new stuff every day."

That is music to Ortego's ears.

"I always knew I wanted to work in the medical field," she said. "I've lived such a blessed life, so full, that I felt compelled to give back."



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