

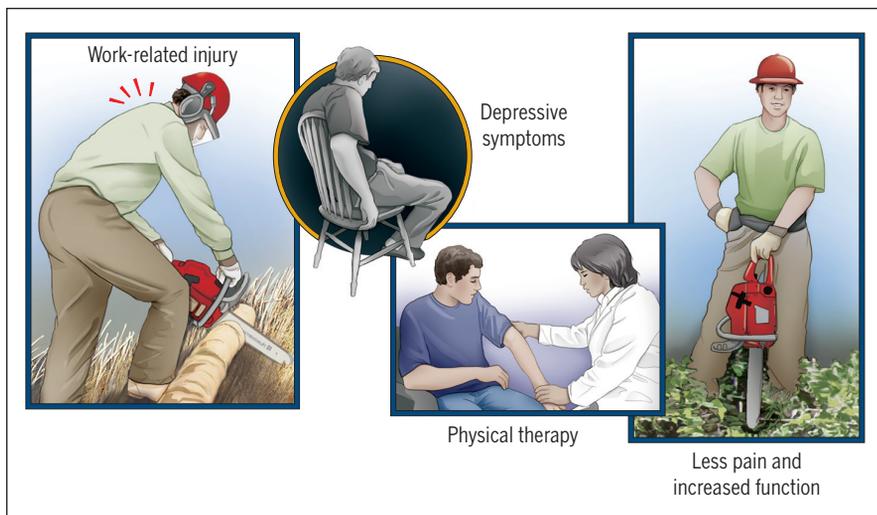
# Work-Related Orthopaedic Injury and Feelings of Depression

## *The Potential Role of Physical Therapy*

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**F**eelings or thoughts of depression may be associated with a muscle or joint injury. When pain and depressive symptoms occur together, they can produce long-lasting problems. It can be difficult to know if these thoughts and feelings are caused by the pain or some other issue. Physical therapists focus on treating musculoskeletal problems; however, for some patients, depressed feelings may ease with treatment designed to decrease pain and improve

function. Other patients may require specialized treatment for symptoms of depression in addition to physical therapy. This is especially true when depressed thoughts and feelings persist, pain has not resolved, and return to work has not been achieved. A study published in the November 2012 issue of *JOSPT* evaluated the change in feelings or thoughts of depression during physical therapy and how it relates to a person's work status 1 year later.



**FEELING DEPRESSED.** Feelings or thoughts of depression can be associated with a work-related muscle or joint injury. Following physical therapy treatment to address their back or neck injuries, patients who experience improvements in pain and work-related disability may also experience improvements in depressive symptoms. Others may require the care of healthcare providers who specialize in diagnosing and providing specialized treatment for depressed thoughts and feelings. If you have such feelings, please share them with your healthcare providers.

For this and more topics, visit *JOSPT* Perspectives for Patients online at [www.jospt.org](http://www.jospt.org).

This *JOSPT* Perspectives for Patients is based on an article by Wideman T et al, titled "Recovery From Depressive Symptoms Over the Course of Physical Therapy: A Prospective Cohort Study of Individuals With Work-Related Orthopaedic Injuries and Symptoms of Depression," *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther* 2012;42(11):957-967, Epub 18 June 2012. doi:10.2519/jospt.2012.4182.

This Perspectives article was written by a team of *JOSPT*'s editorial board and staff, with consultation from Jason Beniucuk and Steven George. Deydre S. Teyhen, PT, PhD, Editor, and Jeanne Robertson, Illustrator.

### NEW INSIGHTS

In this report, 106 patients with work-related injuries involving the back or neck were studied during physical therapy, after physical therapy, and 1 year later. Interestingly, feelings and thoughts of depression eased in approximately 40% of the patients following physical therapy treatment to address pain and functional limitations from back or neck pain. Patients whose depressed feelings improved were more likely to have returned to work and to report less pain intensity 1 year after treatment. Patients whose depressed feelings did not improve were less likely to have returned to work. These results indicate that feelings and thoughts of depression may subside for certain people when they receive physical therapy to treat their back or neck pain.

### PRACTICAL ADVICE

Depressed thoughts and feelings may be present in people with muscle and joint pain, particularly those with work-related injuries. It is important for your physical therapist to know about your depressive symptoms and how they change during physical therapy treatment. This study suggests that depressed feelings and thoughts may subside with physical therapy for back and neck pain, and if they do, the patient is less likely to continue to have problems 1 year later. If depressed thoughts and feelings persist with treatment designed to decrease back and neck pain, your physical therapist may refer you to a healthcare provider trained to diagnose and treat patients specifically for symptoms of depression.



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