

Physiotherapy services for adults with learning disabilities – information for carers

**Lambeth, Southwark
and Lewisham**

The role of Learning Disability Physiotherapy Services

We give specialist assessment, treatment and management to people with a learning disability whose needs cannot be met by general physiotherapy services, even when reasonable adjustments are made.

General physiotherapy services are where most people would go for their NHS physiotherapy needs. General physiotherapy services should make reasonable adjustments for people with a learning disability, such as:

- adapt their communication
- give information in a format that people with a learning disability can understand
- give the person with a learning disability more time
- involve family and carers in discussions and treatment
- make tasks more meaningful for the person with a learning disability
- build a positive rapport with the person with a learning disability, and the carers

If people with a learning disability cannot access general physiotherapy services, even when reasonable adjustments are made, please refer them to this team.

How we manage our referrals

The team accepts referrals directly from the person with a learning disability, their carers, and healthcare professionals. If you are not sure if we are the right team, please call us before putting in a referral.

When we receive your referral, a member of the physiotherapy team will contact you to get more information.

The referral will then be opened or placed on the waiting list on a case-by-case basis, depending on your needs.

A member of the physiotherapy team will contact you to make an appointment when the referral is at the top of the waiting list.

Once the reason for the referral has been dealt with, the referral will be closed. If more physiotherapy help is needed in the future, a new referral can be made.

Mental Capacity Act (MCA)

This is a law that protects vulnerable people over the age of 16, about decision-making. It says that:

- every adult, whatever their disability, has the right to make their own decisions wherever possible
- people should always support a person with a learning disability to make their own decisions if they can. This might mean giving them information in a format that they can understand, or explaining something in a different way
- a decision might be too hard for a person with a learning disability to make, even with appropriate information and support. In this case, family, friends, professionals or support staff must make a decision on behalf of the person with a learning disability. This is called making a best interest decision

For more information on the MCA, visit, [web: www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/mental-capacity-act](http://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/mental-capacity-act)

The main roles of the learning disability physiotherapist

24-hour postural management

Postural problems are common in people with a learning disability who are unable to walk and move on their own.

Postural management aims to support the body over a 24 hour period to:

- promote and maintain physical functional abilities
- prevent and reduce the body shape getting worse
- reduce secondary complications such as contractures (tightening of tissues), chest infections, and pressure sores.

The physiotherapy team will complete a postural assessment, and then develop a postural management programme. This will include the activities and interventions which affect the person's posture and function. Programmes are tailored specifically for each person.

A postural management plan might include:

- positioning/postural care guidelines (standing, sitting, lying)
- personal exercise and movement programmes
- attending appointments to services such as orthotics (devices to give support) and wheelchair services
- advice on medical management including pain and muscle stiffness/spasm (spasticity)
- education and training to the carers
- an approximate review date

Community respiratory management

Respiratory problems are common in people with a learning disability, especially in people who cannot walk and move on their own.

The physiotherapy team provide community-based respiratory assessment and management. We try to reduce chest infections and prevent hospital admissions. To achieve this, the team help:

- to improve the person's cough
- to clear the person's phlegm
- the person to take deep breaths
- to improve the person's fitness

The team will work closely with the respiratory consultants at the Lane Fox Unit in St Thomas' Hospital to manage the person's long-term condition.

Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia) management

People with a learning disability might have swallowing difficulties which can lead to chest infections and weight loss.

We work with speech and language therapists to help find the best position to improve eating and drinking, and help maintain respiratory health.

Management of mobility problems

One of the common changes for people with a learning disability is a reduction in their ability to walk. We can help the person to improve and maintain their mobility through:

- completing a mobility assessment
- developing a home exercise programme
- assessment for, and providing walking aids
- providing advice to family and carers
- supporting appointments to services such as orthotics, the Older Person's Assessment Unit, mainstream rehabilitation and wheelchair services
- advice on the medical management for pain relief and osteoporosis (weak bones)
- advice on appropriate physical activities in the community

Falls prevention and intervention

People with a learning disability have a higher risk of falling. The physiotherapy team can help to reduce the risk of falling and help them to recover from falls.

The team will always try to support the person to use regular falls services. They work very closely with the falls services in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.

The physiotherapy team might:

- complete a falls assessment
- support appointments to falls clinics for medical reviews
- support people with a learning disability to physiotherapy through a falls services
- provide a home exercise programme
- provide training and education to the people supporting the person with a learning disability

More roles of a learning disability physiotherapist

Training and education

The physiotherapy team give training and education to families, support workers and professionals working with people with a learning disability.

These sessions are aimed at improving the understanding and management of the physiotherapy needs of the person with a learning disability.

Teaching the carers how to carry out the physiotherapy programmes

The physiotherapy team will show the carers of the person with a learning disability how to support them to complete their physiotherapy programme.

The physiotherapist will give training and education to make sure the carers can complete the programme safely and effectively.

Contact us

If you have any questions, ask to speak to a physiotherapist:

email: gst-tr.AWLDHealthTeam@nhs.net

Southwark/Lambeth Adults with Learning Disabilities Team, 121 Townley Road, East Dulwich, London, SE22 8SW,

phone: 020 3049 7518

Lewisham Adults with Learning Disabilities Team, First Floor, Old Town Hall, Catford, London, SE6 4RU, **phone:** 020 3989 0550

For more information on conditions, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit

web: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

phone: 020 7188 8815

email: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

web: www.nhs.uk

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