

What is Athletic Therapy?

Who are those people you see on TV all the time, standing behind players at hockey games, courtside at basketball games or walking in as part of Team Canada at the Olympic Games? You might also see them working with varsity teams at universities across the country, behind the scenes at a Cirque de Soleil show, even in some of Canada's high schools! They are Athletic Therapists, a group of highly trained individuals, part of a relatively young profession working with the medical community to help active people stay active.

The question remains; what does an Athletic Therapist do? The simplest explanation uses an image and a comparison. Picture your favourite team. Imagine seeing a player getting hurt, and going down. When that athlete doesn't get up, the person who runs out to help is usually an Athletic Therapist. For an Athletic Therapist, this is one aspect of their work; the second part happens in a health clinic. I usually compare an Athletic Therapist with a Physiotherapist, as just about everyone has had some experience with a Physiotherapist. Essentially, an Athletic Therapist can do many of the same things a Physiotherapist does when it comes to treating injuries, old or new. The big difference is that a Physiotherapist gets you back into your daily routine, where an Athletic Therapist has specialized training to get you back into your sport or activity. This is a brief explanation of what an Athletic Therapist does; the truth goes much deeper than that!

An Athletic Therapist can work in both field and clinic settings. When working "in the field", Athletic Therapists ensure proper warm-up and stretching routines to prevent injury. They provide taping services to support any previous injury like an ankle sprain, perform side-line assessments for old or new injuries as well as check athletes for possible concussions following trauma. In the field, an Athletic Therapist often performs acute injury management; when a player is hurt on the field, they take charge. Athletic Therapists have advanced first aid training and must maintain their first responder status in order to respond to any medical emergency arising. Their training allows them to transfer athletes onto spinal boards, administer oxygen, and remove equipment safely. This means that regardless of your injury or condition, if an Athletic Therapist is on the scene you are in good hands!

When an Athletic Therapist chooses to work in a clinical setting they are specifically geared towards helping active people rehabilitate their injuries and get back to the activity they enjoy. An Athletic Therapist uses range of motion, posture and gait analyses, as well as special tests, to provide a thorough assessment and get

to the root of the problem, not just what is causing you pain at the moment. They use a variety of techniques and modalities such as stretching and strengthening programs, ultrasound, laser therapy, cold or hot therapies, joint mobilizations, bracing, nutritional guidelines, and specific “return to sport” guidelines so you are playing at 100% when you get back to your activity. They educate and guide you through the stages of your injury so you know what to expect.

Now, I know what you are thinking! You aren't an elite athlete, you play recreational soccer, you jog a couple times a week, or go for walks on the weekend, and that Athletic Therapy is not for you. Athletic Therapy is all about keeping you active, doing the activities you enjoy, and not just about treating the star player so the team can win the game. We are highly trained individuals who have a passion for keeping people moving, and we stand behind our work. So the next time you get bumped playing hockey, hurt your elbow golfing, or notice your back aches when walking, give an Athletic Therapist a call. If we can help athletes in the big leagues, we can help you too!

Matthew Moore graduated from York University with a spec. hons. B.Sc. Kine and a certificate in athletic therapy. He later graduated from the Canadian College of Massage and Hydrotherapy and currently practices as a Certified Athletic Therapist, a Registered Massage Therapist, and a Certified Laser Technician at Avalon Laser Health in Churchill Square.