

## Press release

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*For immediate release*

### Physical therapy expertise could cut heart deaths

The profession of physical therapy (known as physiotherapy in many countries) is uniquely qualified to have an impact on the growing global epidemic of diseases related to obesity and unhealthy lifestyles, according to Marilyn Moffat, Professor at New York University and President of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy.

There is an explosion of lifestyle-related diseases (sometimes referred to as “diseases of civilisation”) - obesity, coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke and high blood pressure – around the world. Being overweight, or having an unhealthy diet, is itself a risk factor for all these conditions. Around 180 million people worldwide have diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack and stroke account for 29% of the world’s deaths.

These conditions can often be prevented and treated with exercise, and physical therapists – as the health professionals with most expertise in prescribing exercise for health – can significantly reduce the global burden of illness and death brought by the diseases.

“Exercise, particularly aerobic conditioning and strength training, is a key intervention to prevent obesity, and death and disability from cardiovascular disease and diabetes,” says Marilyn Moffat. “Physical therapists are experts in prescribing these as part of a structured, safe and effective programme. For those already affected by cardiovascular disease and diabetes, physical therapists can help bring a return to work, education, community participation and fulfilled lives.”

*For more information, contact your national physical therapy organisation (see [www.wcpt.org/members](http://www.wcpt.org/members)), see attached background information, or email Simon Crompton at [news@wcpt.org](mailto:news@wcpt.org)*

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The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) represents the physical therapy profession worldwide. WCPT is registered in the UK as a charity.

## **Background information**

### **About physical therapy**

Physical therapists are experts in developing and maintaining people's ability to move and function throughout their lives. With an advanced understanding of how the body moves and what keeps it from moving well, they promote wellness, mobility and independence. They treat and prevent many problems caused by pain, illness, disability and disease, sport and work related injuries, ageing and long periods of inactivity.

Physical therapists are educated over several years, giving them a full knowledge of the body's systems and the skills to treat a wide range of problems. This education is usually university-based, at a level that allows physical therapists to practise independently. Continuing education ensures that they keep up to date with the latest advances in research and practice. Many physical therapists are engaged in research themselves.

More detailed information about what physical therapists do can be found in WCPT's Description of Physical Therapy at <http://www.wcpt.org/node/28657>.

### **About obesity**

Around 350 million people are obese worldwide. Physical activity is one of the best means of countering obesity. Obesity is one of the major risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Children and young people under the age of 18 need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day to promote and maintain health. Adults need 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 days a week, or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity 3 days a week to maintain health. Plus they need to do muscle strengthening exercises at least twice a week.

### **About cardiovascular disease and diabetes**

Cardiovascular disease is the term used to describe diseases affecting the heart and circulatory system, and includes heart disease, stroke and raised blood pressure (hypertension). Diabetes mellitus is a condition where the amount of glucose in the blood is too high, causing tissue damage. Type 2 diabetes usually develops when people are overweight.

### **About the impact of physical therapy on cardiovascular disease and diabetes**

Research has shown that the type of exercise and training prescribed by physical therapists can reduce blood pressure, reduce the risk of stroke and diabetes, and improves outcomes for people who are suffering from coronary heart disease.



More details are available in resource materials on the WCPT website:

[http://www.wcpt.org/sites/wcpt.org/files/files/WPTDay-C2-Cardiovascular\\_disease.pdf](http://www.wcpt.org/sites/wcpt.org/files/files/WPTDay-C2-Cardiovascular_disease.pdf)

<http://www.wcpt.org/sites/wcpt.org/files/files/WPTDay-C3-Diabetes.pdf>

## **About World Physical Therapy Day**

World Physical Therapy Day falls on 8th September every year, and is an opportunity for physical therapists from all over the world to raise awareness about their crucial role in keeping people well, mobile and independent. The day was established by WCPT in 1996, and marks the date on which WCPT was founded.

## **About the World Confederation for Physical Therapy**

WCPT is the profession's global body representing over 300,000 physical therapists/physiotherapists from member organisations in 101 countries. For more information go to [www.wcpt.org](http://www.wcpt.org).