

How physiotherapy works in the Netherlands:

A guide for international students and expats

As an international student or expat living in the Netherlands, navigating an unfamiliar healthcare service can be a daunting prospect. However, physiotherapy is easily accessible and getting the help you need shouldn't prove difficult. Here we explain how physiotherapy works in the Netherlands.

Do you need a referral for physiotherapy?

In the Netherlands, you do not need a referral from a doctor to see a physiotherapist. This system, called Direct Access to Physiotherapy (DTF), it allows patients to book directly with a physiotherapist, who will screen for any underlying issues.

Is physiotherapy covered by health insurance?

There are two main types of health insurance that affect physiotherapy coverage in the Netherlands:

Basic Health Insurance (*Basisverzekering*)

Physiotherapy is generally not covered by the basic insurance unless you have specific long-term conditions such as Parkinson's, had a stroke, suffer from chronic joint issues or after certain surgeries. In these cases, insurance often starts covering from the 21st session, meaning the first 20 sessions are typically paid out-of-pocket.

Supplementary Insurance (*Aanvullende Verzekering*)

Many international students and expats opt for supplementary insurance to cover a certain number of physiotherapy sessions each year. It's a good idea to check your policy to see what is included. Many physiotherapists conduct an insurance check during your first visit, ensuring transparency about coverage.

What to expect in a physiotherapy session

Your first physiotherapy session will usually involve an initial assessment. The physiotherapist will examine your symptoms, discuss your medical history, and evaluate your movement and pain levels. From there, they will create a personalised treatment plan, which may include:

- Manual therapy such as massage or joint mobilisation
- Exercise programs to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility
- Posture correction to prevent future issues

Quality and education of physiotherapy in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is internationally recognised for its high standards of physiotherapy education. Physiotherapists complete a four-year bachelor's degree and can specialise in fields like sports physiotherapy or manual therapy. This level of education is comparable to the United Kingdom and Australia, and exceeds that of some countries where physiotherapy training programmes are shorter.

Should I book an appointment with a physiotherapist?

If you are experiencing any kind of joint or muscle issues, are planning to take part in a sporting event such as a marathon or are having mobility issues, a physiotherapist may be able to help you. Booking an appointment directly means they can quickly assess the problems and give you the advice and help that you need.