

Help heal
victims of torture.

Visit
www.cvt.org/what-you-can-do/volunteer

The American Physical Therapy Association promotes the World Confederation for Physical Therapy’s Declaration of Principle Against the Practice of Torture.

Whereas, Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants have an ethical obligation to respect the rights and dignities of all individuals, particularly those of the vulnerable, and to provide care that is consistent with the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) care values of altruism, compassion and caring;

Resolved, That the American Physical Therapy Association promotes the World Confederation for Physical Therapy’s Declaration of Principle Against the Practice of Torture.

RESOLVED.

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The CENTER for VICTIMS of TORTURE

Physical Therapy Considerations when Working with Torture Survivors

**Identify At-Risk Populations
in Your Area**

An estimated 500,000 refugees living in the U.S. are victims of torture, with 30,000-40,000 living in MN. Some of the largest refugee populations include Hmong, Somalis, Vietnamese, Ethiopians, Liberians, Cambodians, Bosnians, people from the Former Soviet Union, Karen, Burma, Bhutan, and Iraq.

Torture methods of suspension, beatings, forced positions, strapping, sexual and electric torture all lead to pain and injury.

**Signs of a history of torture
may include\*\*:**

* Scars
* Acute or chronic pain
* Survivor of falanga\* torture
* Indications of a diminished connection to the body such as:
	+ - Decreased posture
		- Decreased body awareness
		- Decreased self-regulation
		- Decreased proprioception
* Decreased strength, ROM
* Decreased mobility or ability to perform desired activities

\*Falanga: A form of torture which consists of beating the soles of the victim's feet with a solid object.

\*\* All webinars are archived and can be accessed at: **www.healtorture.org**

Additional Information on Treating Victims of Torture

Free Webinar

**“Physical Therapy with Survivors of Torture”**

All webinars are archived and can be accessed at: **www.healtorture.org**

[**www.dignitydk.org**](http://www.dignitydk.org/)

Dignity-Danish Institute Against Torture offers an online library of articles and books about PT and torture. Will mail books and articles for free.

**www.irct.org**

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victim’s is a health-based umbrella organization that supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and the prevention of torture worldwide.

**www.HealTorture.org**

A community website that both supports, and is supported by, people who work in torture treatment centers. Resources include [webinars](http://healtorture.org/webinars), [videos](http://healtorture.org/videos), [publications](http://healtorture.org/publications),
[links](http://healtorture.org/links), and [bibliographies](http://healtorture.org/resource-types/bibliographies).

**Initiate the Conversation**

Many victims of torture look to the authority and knowledge of health care professionals to address the health impacts of torture.

Some simple questions to initiate the conversation include:

'Were you ever harmed or threatened by the following: government, police, military or rebel soldiers?”

“Some people in your situation have experienced torture. Has that ever happened to you or your family?”

**References**

Miles S, Garcia-Peltoniemi R. Torture survivors:  What to ask, how to document. The Journal of Family Practice. 2012;61(4): E1-E5.

O’Dougherty S, Mehta E. Refugees’ perspectives on barriers to communication about trauma histories in primary care. Mental Health in Family Medicine. 2012;9: 47-55.

Talking About Torture

Screening for Signs of Torture

**Modifying Your Treatment**

Consider some of these suggestions to avoid re-traumatizing a client who has experienced torture:

* **Be on time**
* **Keep doors or curtain open if desired by client**
* **Avoid excessive questions initially so the client does not feel like it’s an interrogation**
* **Be extremely sensitive about introducing modalities which may be similar to torture experiences, such as electrical therapy**