Glossary of commonly used Physical Therapy terms

Abduction - A movement of a limb away from midline or the center of the body

Adduction - A movement of a limb toward midline or the center of the body

Ataxia - Muscular incoordination especially manifested when voluntary muscular movements are attempted

Base of support - The weight-bearing surface of the body. For example: in standing = the feet

Bilateral - Pertaining to two sides of the body, as in: both arms or both legs

Calcaneal Valgum - Angling of the heel of the foot outward, thereby flattening the arch of the foot

Calcaneal Varum - Angling of the heel of the foot inward, thereby increasing or heightening the arch of the foot

Cervical - Pertaining to the neck

Core - Pertaining to the trunk (primarily abdominals and back)

Dissociation - To separate. For example: one extremity/limb performs a movement without the other extremity doing the same or similar movement at the same time

Distal - Farthest from the center, from midline or from the trunk

Dynamic - Pertaining to vital forces or inherent power; refers to the body in motion; opposite of stationary

Extension - A straightening or backward movement of the spine or limbs

External rotation - An outward turning of the limb away from the body

Flexion - A bending or forward movement of the spine or limbs

Genu Valgum - Angling of the knees inward as in “knock kneed”

Genu Varum - Angling of the knees outward as in “bow legged”

Gross Motor - Refers to movement of large muscle groups

Hamstrings - A muscle group on the back of the thigh that can bend/flex the knee and straighten/extend the hip

Hyperextension - Excessive movement in the direction of extension
**Hypermobility** - Movement beyond normal range of motion

**Hypertonic** - Muscle tone higher than normal; resistance to passive movement; in extreme form = spasticity

**Hypotonic** - Less than normal tone; floppy

**Internal rotation** - An inward turning of the limb toward the body

**Instability** - Lack of firmness in weight-bearing. Difficulty maintaining weight bearing

**Kinesthesia** - Conscious awareness (perception) of body movement (direction and speed), detected by joints

**Kyphosis** - An increased convexity in the curvature of the thoracic spine (hunchback)

**Long-sitting** - Sitting with legs straight out in front

**Lordosis** - An anterior/forward curvature of the lumbar and cervical vertebrae (spine). An increase is often referred to as “sway-back”

**Lumbar** - Pertaining to the low back

**Midline** - The theoretical lines that divide the body into two equal halves vertically or horizontally

**Motor Control** - The ability of the Central Nervous System to regulate or direct the musculoskeletal system in a purposeful act

**Motor Planning** - The ability to organize and perform movement in a meaningful manner

**Obliquity** - A slanting

**Pes Planus** - Flat feet

**Prone** - Lying on the belly, face down

**Proprioception** - The awareness of posture, movement, changes in equilibrium, and the knowledge of position, weight, and resistance of objects in relation to the body. Sensed by muscles, tendons, and soft tissue

**Proximal** - Nearest to the point of attachment or center of the body

**Quadriceps** - A large muscle group on the anterior/front surface of the thigh responsible for knee extension

**Range of Motion** - A measure of the amount of movement/motion available at any given joint of the body

**Recurvatum** - A backward bending, frequently referring to the knees

**Reflex** - An involuntary/automatic response to a stimulus

**Ring Sitting** - Sitting on the buttocks with legs forming a ring in front (not crossed)

**Sacral** - The triangular-shaped bone below the lumbar spine formed, typically, by the fusion of 5 vertebrae
Side-sitting - Sitting on one hip with legs flexed to the opposite side

Spasticity - Hypertension of muscles causing stiff and awkward movements

Static - At rest; in equilibrium; not in motion

Supine - Lying on the back, face up

Symmetrical - Referring to symmetry of the body, whose right and left halves are mirror images of each other

Tactile Defensiveness - A negative response or increased sensitivity to touch

Tailor-sitting - Buttocks on the floor with legs flexed and crossed (“pretzel sitting”)

Thoracic - Pertaining to or affecting the chest or upper back

Tone (muscle) - The degree of tension normally present in the resting state of a muscle

Unilateral - Affecting or occurring on only one side of the body

Vestibular Stimulation - Stimulation of the vestibular apparatus (bones of the inner ear and canals) that provides information regarding acceleration and the position of the body in space

Weight shift - Translation or movement of body weight from one side to another, forward or back