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# What Happens Between Visits Matters More Than You Think

## Introduction

One of the most challenging parts of patient care is realizing that progress doesn't only happen during treatment sessions. In many cases, what patients do between visits has just as much influence on outcomes as the treatment itself.

When therapists discuss setbacks, plateaus, or slower-than-expected progress, one common factor arises: patients assume the benefits of treatment will continue automatically without any participation on their part.

This is perhaps the most common mistake patients make between visits.

## **The "Fix Me" Mentality**

Many patients understandably approach therapy with a passive mindset. They schedule an appointment, receive treatment, experience some improvement, and expect the therapist to take care of the rest.

The problem is that the body continues to respond to mechanical, physiological, and behavioral influences long after the session ends.

If the causes contributing to congestion, swelling, inflammation, poor movement, or tissue stress remain unchanged, the body may slowly return to its previous state.

Therapy creates an opportunity for change. What happens afterward often determines how much of that change is maintained.

## **Inconsistency Is More Harmful Than Imperfection**

Many therapists spend significant time educating patients about self-care strategies:

- Compression use
- Home exercises
- Movement recommendations
- Hydration habits
- Skin care
- Breathing exercises
- Positioning techniques
- Activity modifications

Yet patients frequently believe that if they cannot follow every recommendation perfectly, there is little value in doing any of them.

This all-or-nothing thinking can be surprisingly damaging.

In reality, consistency usually matters far more than perfection. Small actions performed regularly often produce greater long-term benefits than occasional bursts of ideal compliance.

A patient who performs five minutes of diaphragmatic breathing daily may achieve more meaningful results than someone who follows an extensive routine only once or twice per week.

## **Waiting for Symptoms to Return**

Another common mistake is waiting until symptoms worsen before resuming self-care.

Many patients discontinue helpful habits as soon as they begin feeling better. Compression garments stay in the drawer. Exercises stop. Walking routines disappear.

Then, when swelling, heaviness, discomfort, or stiffness returns, they attempt to restart everything at once.

This cycle creates unnecessary fluctuations with symptoms and often leads patients to believe that treatment "stopped working" when, in reality, maintenance strategies were abandoned.

Successful long-term management is usually proactive rather than reactive.

## **Misinterpreting Temporary Changes**

Patients also frequently misinterpret normal fluctuations.

Swelling may vary throughout the day. Healing can occur in phases. Some individuals feel improvement immediately, while others notice changes days later.

When patients expect progress to be completely linear, temporary increases in symptoms can feel alarming.

As a result, they may abandon recommendations prematurely or assume that treatment was ineffective.

Helping patients understand that recovery regularly involves variation—not just steady improvement—can improve both compliance and confidence.

## **The Value of Patient Ownership**

The most successful patients often share one characteristic: they view themselves as active participants in the process.

They understand that treatment sessions are important, but they also recognize that daily habits influence lymphatic function, tissue health, movement quality, and overall outcomes.

This does not mean they are perfect.

They miss exercises. They forget compression occasionally. They have busy weeks.

The difference is that they consistently return to the habits that support their progress instead of abandoning them altogether.

## **What Therapists Can Do**

Therapists can help reduce between-visit setbacks by simplifying expectations.

Rather than overwhelming patients with extensive instructions, focus on the few behaviors that are most likely to influence outcomes.

Patients are more likely to succeed when recommendations are:

- Clear

- Specific
- Realistic
- Easy to remember
- Sustainable over time

Sometimes the most effective home program is not the most comprehensive one—it is the one the patient will actually perform.

## Final Thoughts

The most common mistake patients make between visits is assuming that treatment alone advances progress.

In reality, long-term improvement is usually the result of a partnership between therapist and patient. Treatment sessions provide guidance, intervention, and direction, while daily habits reinforce and maintain those gains.

When patients understand their role in the process, outcomes frequently become more predictable, more lasting, and ultimately more successful.



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