

Self-selected walking speed is a powerful indicator of functional status. While walking speed is a simple, robust, and clinically useful measure, physical therapists may not routinely use it as a baseline and outcome measure. This evidence-based presentation will: 1) discuss why walking speed should be considered a “vital sign” for function; 2) demonstrate how walking speed can be used to assess intervention, determine discharge location, and predict health status and fall risk; 3) suggest strategies to measure walking speed in different settings; and 4) discuss how to use walking speed for functional classification, while considering the normative data and responsiveness.

Learning Objectives:

1. discuss the rationale for and importance of using self-selected walking speed as a “vital sign” for function
2. identify a plan of action to incorporate measurement of self-selected walking speed into routine physical therapy examination for patients typically seen in their practice setting
3. describe a strategy for examination of self-selected walking speed that will be feasible to integrate in their particular clinical practice setting
4. describe key clinometric properties of walking speed as a measure of current function, outcome measure, and predictor of future function in the population of patients typically seen in their practice setting
5. describe how to use normative data and indexes of responsiveness to aide in the interpretation of walking speed data

Key References:

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