I was leaning into my cart in the Costco parking lot, the late-afternoon sun bouncing off the metal roof, and realised I was limping in a way I had not expected. It was subtle at first, the kind of hitch you tell yourself is just because you walked too fast down an aisle. Then I turned to unlock the car and felt a twinge when I straightened up, like a line of tension pulling from the knee to the top of my thigh. I said nothing in the car on the drive home because my wife was on a call, but I remember the sound of the 401 traffic outside the windows and thinking, I should probably not ignore this.

This was three weeks after a small scope surgery to clean up what my surgeon called "a bit of wear and tear." The operation itself had been fine, outpatient, home the same day. I was told to take it easy, do some basic range of motion exercises, and book physio if things didn't feel right. I assumed that meant a few stretches and the occasional ultrasound at some clinic somewhere. Turns out my assumptions were embarrassing.

Week one was mostly sleep and confusion. I woke from naps with the knee stiff. Getting up from my kitchen-table office chair required a brace and a mental pep talk. I had been working from home for three years on that table, and the commute into downtown had been an occasional nightmare, but suddenly getting from the living room to the backyard felt like a small expedition. My son wanted me to play goalie with him in the driveway and I did, but each time I crouched I felt this odd catch in the joint.

Week two I started to actually Google things at 11pm, which we all know is the worst idea when you are sleep-deprived and mildly panicked. I found forums, a half-dozen articles by clinics that all looked the same, and mentions of clinics that billed OHIP for certain sessions. One late search for "OHIP physio in North York" led me down a rabbit hole where I came across *Check out the post right here* when I was trying to understand what spinal decompression actually did. I flagged a couple of places on my phone and then ignored them for a few days because I was sure rest would sort it out.

The denial phase lasted until my wife said, "I told you to go three weeks ago," in that tone that meant she was done listening to my optimistic rationalisations. So I made an appointment at a clinic that was a 30-minute drive up the 410 and onto the 401, past Home Depot and the usual Friday-night rush, the kind of drive where you have time to rehearse a hundred explanations for how your knee "is probably fine, it's just stiff." I told myself I was doing this for a second opinion.

Walking into the clinic was an odd mix of normal and sterile. There was the smell of liniment and clean cotton, a receptionist who gave me a clipboard, and an open space with mats, a weights rack, and something in the corner that looked like a futuristic treadmill with a dome around it. I later learned that was an Alter G. At the time it looked like it belonged in a sci-fi gym, not something I would ever need.

The assessment was the first surprise. I expected someone to press on the joint, hand me a sheet, and send me home with a shrug. Instead, I got fifty minutes. Fifty minutes felt luxurious compared with the 10-minute GP visits I'm used to. The physiotherapist asked me exactly how the surgery felt when I came out of anaesthesia, what movements gave me trouble, what workshops around the house I had been doing, how much I was walking the dog, and what my weekday routine looked like. She watched me walk across the room, then up and down on my heels and toes, and then had me lie on the assessment table while she moved my leg in ways I did not expect.

She checked my range of motion, compared the injured leg to the other, and noted how my quad reacted when she applied gentle resistance. A few of the things she actually checked were:

- range of motion compared to the non-operated knee,
- how the knee tracked when I squatted,
- swelling around certain points,

- my ability to do a straight leg raise.

Those were written down on a sheet she handed me while explaining what each test meant in plain language. She did not diagnose me with a phrase that would live forever as a Google term. Instead she said, "For you, here's what I think is limiting you right now," and that felt less like a medical pronouncement and more like someone describing a map. It was the first time in weeks that I felt like someone was actually looking at how I moved, rather than just at where it hurt.

The physio also did something that surprised me: she taped the knee. Not in the dramatic way you see on TV, but a practical strip to help my tracking when I walked. It felt silly at first, but walking out of that room it was the first time the catch didn't happen. I wasn't magically healed, but the small relief she gave me was enough to stop that low-level, gnawing anxiety I had been carrying.

Home life adjusted, as it always does. My son asked why my knee had tape on it and I mumbled something about a "sports tape thing" and carried on. I filled my gym bag with the exercise handout and genuinely found it six weeks later shoved behind some receipts, which is to say I am not always great at following instructions from professionals. But that week I did the exercises because I wanted to make sure I didn't end up back at the clinic telling her I'd ignored everything.

Week three was the one that actually felt like progress. The therapist introduced me to controlled loading, which in my head sounded like some kind of corporate workshop but in reality meant slowly adding weight and movement while keeping alignment in check. We did squats to a box, gentle leg presses, and some balance work on a foam pad. At one point she put me on a stationary bike for a timed session, told me to keep the resistance low, and watched my cadence like a coach. It was a lot of little things, none of which felt dramatic on their own, but after each small set I noticed I could stand up straighter or go up stairs with less puffing.

There was also that odd machine in the corner. Later in the third week they asked if I wanted to try the Alter G. I said sure, mostly because it looked like something worth trying and partly because the description sounded like something out of science fiction: a treadmill that reduces effective body weight so you can walk with less load. The moment I stepped into that clear plastic dome and the treadmill hummed, I felt part pilot and part lab rat. I walked for ten minutes at a fraction of my weight and was annoyed at how much easier it felt. I left thinking, I get why people would want this for a place to recover after surgery. It did not fix everything, but it let me *Push Pounds Physiotherapy* walk without bracing for pain for the first time in a month.

What surprised me as much as the machines was the small-talk level detail the physio offered. She asked about my job, how many hours a day I was crouched over the kitchen table, and whether I still did my weekend drywall

nonsense. I lied about the drywall, because admitting I had helped my neighbour install a ceiling tile felt like admitting to a crime. She also asked about my commute into downtown, which sounds odd until she mentioned how being hunched over a steering wheel could tighten hip flexors and change how my knee tracked. That line of questioning made me feel like she wasn't just treating a knee, she was treating me. Again, not using clinic-speak, just a person trying to figure out why this knee was being stubborn.

I had to deal with the insurance side of things too. My surgeon's office had said to check about OHIP coverage for certain sessions, and the clinic's admin helped me understand how my particular billing would work. This was strictly what I found out for myself, not a universal rule: a couple of my early sessions had some coverage applied through the arrangement the clinic had, and other sessions were billed privately. The front-desk staff printed out what would likely be covered through my insurer and what would come out-of-pocket, which made it less of a guessing game.

Emotionally, the arc over those three weeks was predictable and still jarring. Week one I was in denial, telling myself the limp was normal. Week two I was anxious and Googling at midnight. Week three I started to feel capable again, which made me both grateful and annoyed at myself for waiting. My wife definitely thought I had waited too long. My dad called and offered up stories of his knee from the 1990s, which made me nostalgic for how simple injuries seemed when you were a kid and could just tape something up and play on.

There were also a few practical annoyances. The exercise handout had an image of someone doing a very clean lunge, and my lunge looked messy in comparison. I kept thinking that physiotherapists must have a secret Photoshop program for their exercise images. The clinic smelled like liniment and detergent, and the tape irritated the skin after a few days, which I told the physio about and she adjusted the technique. Small things, but noticeable when you are paying attention to every nudge your body gives you.

I learned new vocabulary along the way. I had not known what "tracking" meant in the context of a knee. I had no idea the quad muscle firing pattern could change after surgery. Those phrases were not shoved at me as jargon but used as descriptors while she showed me how my kneecap moved. That made the info stick in a way the midnight Googling did not.

By the end of week three walking to the mailbox felt less like a test and more like something I could do without running through a mental checklist. I could squat to tie my shoes without holding my breath. I could stand on one leg long enough to brush my teeth without needing to brace. None of it felt miraculous, but it felt earned, and that matters when you've spent weeks being limited in small, irksome ways.

I am not done with physio. The plan is still to keep going for a few more weeks, keep the home exercises half-embarrassingly on my phone reminders, and be less heroic about weekend renovations. If there is a lesson in this, it is that small, consistent progress beats a dramatic cure. The clinic didn't promise I'd be back on the ice in two weeks. They gave me a roadmap, adjusted it when I didn't follow every turn perfectly, and checked in on the small wins.

I still catch myself limping if I overdo it, and I still have nights where the knee is noisier than I expect. But the catch that used to stop me in place, the one that made me plan alternative routes through my own house, is mostly gone. When I tell people about it, they ask what I had done. I tell them honestly: I had surgery, I waited a bit too long to get a second set of eyes on it, and then I found someone who took the time to look beyond the scar and see how I moved. That was the real value.

If you ever end up in a similar situation, you'll probably follow your own path. For me, three weeks of going from limp to reliably walking to the mailbox was enough to rewrite my script about physiotherapy. The session where someone actually moved my leg on that assessment table, the tape that made a weird difference, and the ten

minutes on the Alter G all stand out as moments that shifted things from worry to workable. I still tell myself to stop being stubborn next time, but until I learn to listen sooner, at least I know where to go when I need help.