

## Physical Therapist

The physical therapist provides services to many different kinds of patients/clients, from those recovering from accidents or illness and people with disabilities to world-class athletes. Physical therapists help improve patients' strength and mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities. Physical therapists take a personal and direct approach to meeting an individual's health goals, working closely with the patient and other health care practitioners. They provide the patient and the patient's family with instruction and home programs to ensure that healing continues after direct patient care has ended.

Physical therapists also work to keep people well and safe from injury, emphasizing the importance of fitness and conditioning and showing people how to avoid injuries at work or play. Physical therapy promotes optimal physical performance and enables health-conscious people to increase their overall fitness level and muscular strength and endurance.



### History

The American Women's Physical Therapeutic Association was formed in 1921. It was later known as the American Physiotherapy Association, then became the American Physical Therapy Association in the late 1940s.

Recognition and accreditation of programs in physical therapy has existed since 1928. In the early years, the process was overseen by the APTA; then the American Medical Association (AMA) provided these services; and later the APTA and AMA collaborated to accredit physical therapy programs. In 1979, the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) was recognized by USDE as an independent agency, and in 1982 AMA ceased accrediting physical therapy programs. Since 1982, CAPTE has been the only recognized accrediting agency in physical therapy.



### Career Description

The physical therapist is able to evaluate a patient's:

- Aerobic capacity and endurance
- Joint motion
- Muscle strength and endurance
- Posture
- Pain
- Functional ability
- Muscle tone and reflexes
- Appearance and stability of walking
- Need and use of braces and artificial limbs
- Function of the heart and lungs
- Integrity of sensation and perception
- Integrity and health of skin
- Performance of activities required in daily living
- Developmental activities

Physical therapy techniques include:

- Therapeutic exercise
- Mobilization/manipulation and range-of-motion exercises
- Cardiovascular endurance training
- Relaxation exercises
- Therapeutic massage
- Biofeedback
- Training in activities of daily living
- Wound debridement

- Pulmonary physical therapy
- Ambulation training

Modalities, including traction, ultrasound, diathermy, electrotherapy, cryotherapy, hydrotherapy, and laser therapy, also can be applied during the treatment program.



### Employment Characteristics

Physical therapists work in hospitals as well as:

- Private physical therapy offices
- Community health centers
- Corporate or industrial health centers
- Sports facilities
- Research institutions
- Rehabilitation centers
- Nursing homes
- Home health agencies
- Schools
- Pediatric centers
- Colleges and universities



### Salary

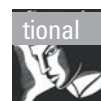
Average annual income for physical therapists is approximately \$70,000, depending on geographic location and practice setting. Physical therapists have the potential to earn more than \$100,000 annually. Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2007 shows that wages at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile were \$48,530, the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (median) at \$69,760, and the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile at \$100,080 ([www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291123.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291123.htm)). For more information, refer to [www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary).



### Employment Outlook

Career opportunities in the field of physical therapy will increase as the "baby boom" generation ages and more patients begin to require treatment for arthritis, stroke, heart disease, and other conditions common to older people. In addition, with the nation's increasing participation in sports and fitness activities, more physical therapists will be needed to treat and help prevent knee, leg, back, shoulder, and other musculoskeletal injuries.

Opportunities also exist for physical therapists from minority groups, who are in great demand but short supply in all aspects of the profession. When physical therapists and their clients share a common language and similar background, the effectiveness of treatment is enhanced.



### Educational Programs

**Length.** All physical therapist education programs culminate in a post-baccalaureate degree.

**Prerequisites.** Candidates should have a high overall grade point average (GPA) and a high GPA in prerequisite coursework. Volunteer experience as a physical therapy aide, letters of recommendation from physical therapists or science teachers, and excellent writing and interpersonal skills are also highly valued.

**Curriculum.** Educational programs include basic and clinical medical science courses and emphasize the theory and practice of

physical therapy. The curriculum includes opportunities to apply and integrate theory through extensive clinical education and a variety of practice settings.



### **Licensure, Certification, and Registration**

After graduating from an accredited education program, physical therapist candidates must pass a state-administered national exam. Other requirements for physical therapy practice vary from state to state according to physical therapy practice acts or state regulations that govern physical therapy. For more information, contact the state licensing boards.



### **Inquiries**

#### **Careers, Education, and Certification**

American Physical Therapy Association  
1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488  
703 684-2782 or 800 999-2782  
703 684-7343 Fax  
[www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)

#### **Program Accreditation**

Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education  
Mary Jane Harris, MS PT, Director of Accreditation  
1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703 684-2782  
[www.apta.org/capte](http://www.apta.org/capte)