



Physical Therapist Overview

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The Field

Physical therapists provide services that help restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. They restore, maintain, and promote overall fitness and health. Their patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as low-back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.



Therapists examine patients' medical histories and then test and measure the patients' strength, range of motion, balance and coordination, posture, muscle performance, respiration, and motor function. Next, physical therapists develop plans describing a treatment strategy and its anticipated outcome. Treatment often includes exercise, especially for patients who have been immobilized or who lack flexibility, strength, or endurance. Physical therapists encourage patients to use their muscles to increase their flexibility and range of motion. More advanced exercises focus on improving strength, balance, coordination, and endurance. The goal is to improve how an individual functions at work and at home.

Physical therapists also use electrical stimulation, hot packs or cold compresses, and ultrasound to relieve pain and reduce swelling. They may use traction or deep-tissue massage to relieve pain and improve circulation and flexibility. Therapists also teach patients to use assistive and adaptive devices, such as crutches, prostheses, and wheelchairs. They also may show patients how to do exercises at home to expedite their recovery.

As treatment continues, physical therapists document the patient's progress, conduct periodic examinations, and modify treatments when necessary. Physical therapists often consult and practice with a variety of other professionals, such as physicians, dentists, nurses, educators, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and audiologists.

Some physical therapists treat a wide range of ailments; others specialize in areas such as pediatrics, geriatrics, orthopedics, sports medicine, neurology, and cardiopulmonary physical therapy.



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Preparation

Physical therapists need a master's degree from an accredited physical therapy program and a State license, requiring passing scores on national and State examinations.

Physical therapist education programs start with basic science courses such as biology, chemistry, and physics and then introduce specialized courses, including biomechanics, neuroanatomy, human growth and development, manifestations of disease, examination techniques, and therapeutic procedures. Besides getting classroom and laboratory instruction, students receive supervised clinical experience.

Among the undergraduate courses that are useful when one applies to a physical therapist education program are anatomy, biology, chemistry, social science, mathematics, and physics. Before granting admission, many programs require volunteer experience in the physical therapy department of a hospital or clinic. For high school students, volunteering with the school athletic trainer is a good way to gain experience.

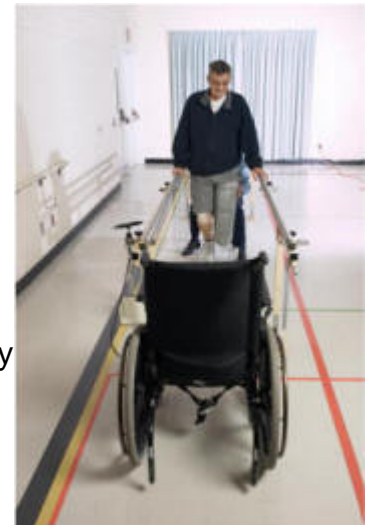
Physical therapists are expected to continue their professional development by participating in continuing education courses and workshops. In fact, a number of States require continuing education as a condition of maintaining licensure.

All States require physical therapists to pass national and State licensure exams before they can practice. They must also graduate from an accredited physical therapist education program.

Physical therapists should have strong interpersonal skills so that they can educate patients about their physical therapy treatments and communicate with patients' families. Physical therapists also should be compassionate and possess a desire to help patients.

► Accredited Programs

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education accredits first professional (entry-level) programs in the U.S. for the physical therapist at the master's and doctoral degree levels and programs for the physical therapist assistant at the associate degree level. There are currently 209 accredited physical therapist education programs. Of the accredited programs, 43 offered master's degrees and 166 offered doctoral degrees. Only master's degree and doctoral degree programs are accredited, in accordance with the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. In the future, a doctoral degree might be the required entry-level degree. Master's degree programs typically last 2 years, and doctoral degree programs last 3 years.



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The following table provides links to currently accredited physical therapy programs:

<p>Alabama</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Alabama State University ▶ The University of Alabama at Birmingham ▶ University of South Alabama <p>Arizona</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ AT Still University of Health Sciences ▶ Northern Arizona University <p>Arkansas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Arkansas State University ▶ University of Central Arkansas <p>California</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Azusa Pacific University ▶ California State University, Fresno ▶ California State University, Long Beach ▶ California State University, Northridge ▶ California State University, Sacramento ▶ Chapman University ▶ Loma Linda University ▶ Mount St Mary's College ▶ Samuel Merritt College ▶ University of California, San Francisco/San Francisco State University ▶ University of Southern California ▶ University of St Augustine for Health Sciences ▶ University of the Pacific ▶ Western University of Health Sciences <p>Colorado</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Regis University ▶ University of Colorado Denver <p>Connecticut</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Quinnipiac University ▶ Sacred Heart University ▶ University of Connecticut ▶ University of Hartford <p>Delaware</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Delaware <p>District of Columbia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Howard University ▶ The George Washington University <p>Florida</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University ▶ Florida Gulf Coast University ▶ Florida International University ▶ Nova Southeastern University 	<p>Nebraska</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Creighton University ▶ University of Nebraska Medical Center - NV ▶ University of Nevada, Las Vegas <p>New Hampshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Franklin Pierce University <p>New Jersey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Graduate School Camden and University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey ▶ Seton Hall University ▶ The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey ▶ University of Medicine & Dentistry of NJ <p>New Mexico</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of New Mexico <p>New York</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clarkson University ▶ College of Staten Island/Graduate Center CUNY ▶ Columbia University ▶ D'Youville College ▶ Daemen College ▶ Dominican College of Blauvelt ▶ Hunter College/The Graduate Center CUNY ▶ Ithaca College ▶ Long Island University - Brooklyn Campus ▶ Mercy College ▶ Nazareth College of Rochester ▶ New York Institute of Technology ▶ New York Medical College ▶ New York University ▶ State University of NY Downstate Medical Ctr. ▶ State University of NY Upstate Medical Univ. ▶ Stony Brook University ▶ The Sage Colleges ▶ Touro College ▶ University at Buffalo, State University of NY ▶ Utica College <p>North Carolina</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Duke University ▶ East Carolina University ▶ Elon University ▶ The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ▶ Western Carolina University ▶ Winston-Salem State University
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- Florida (continued)
- ▶ University of Central Florida
 - ▶ University of Florida
 - ▶ University of Miami
 - ▶ University of North Florida
 - ▶ University of South Florida
 - ▶ University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences

- Georgia
- ▶ Armstrong Atlantic State University in Consortium with Medical College of Georgia and North Georgia College and State University
 - ▶ Emory University
 - ▶ Georgia State University
 - ▶ Medical College of Georgia in Consortium with Armstrong Atlantic State University and North Georgia College and State University
 - ▶ North Georgia College and State University in Consortium with Medical College of Georgia and Armstrong Atlantic State University

- Idaho
- ▶ Idaho State University

- Illinois
- ▶ Bradley University
 - ▶ Governors State University
 - ▶ Midwestern University
 - ▶ Northern Illinois University
 - ▶ Northwestern University
 - ▶ Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science
 - ▶ The University of Illinois at Chicago

- Indiana
- ▶ Indiana University
 - ▶ University of Evansville
 - ▶ University of Indianapolis

- Iowa
- ▶ Clarke College
 - ▶ Des Moines University - Osteopathic Medical Center
 - ▶ St Ambrose University
 - ▶ The University of Iowa

- Kansas
- ▶ University of Kansas Medical Center
 - ▶ Wichita State University

- Kentucky
- ▶ Bellarmine University
 - ▶ University of Kentucky

- North Dakota
- ▶ University of Mary
 - ▶ University of North Dakota

- Ohio
- ▶ Cleveland State University
 - ▶ College of Mount St. Joseph
 - ▶ Ohio University
 - ▶ The Ohio State University
 - ▶ The University of Findlay
 - ▶ University of Cincinnati
 - ▶ University of Dayton
 - ▶ University of Toledo
 - ▶ Walsh University
 - ▶ Youngstown State University

- Oklahoma
- ▶ Langston University
 - ▶ University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

- Oregon
- ▶ Pacific University

- Pennsylvania
- ▶ Arcadia University
 - ▶ Chatham University
 - ▶ Drexel University
 - ▶ Duquesne University
 - ▶ Gannon University
 - ▶ Lebanon Valley College
 - ▶ Misericordia University
 - ▶ Neumann College
 - ▶ Saint Francis University
 - ▶ Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
 - ▶ Temple University
 - ▶ Thomas Jefferson University
 - ▶ University of Pittsburgh
 - ▶ University of Scranton
 - ▶ University of the Sciences in Philadelphia
 - ▶ Widener University

- Puerto Rico
- ▶ University of Puerto Rico - Medical Sciences Campus

- Rhode Island
- ▶ University of Rhode Island

- South Carolina
- ▶ Medical University of South Carolina
 - ▶ University of South Carolina - Columbia

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<p>Louisiana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans ▶ Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport <p>Maine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Husson College ▶ University of New England <p>Maryland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Maryland - Baltimore ▶ University of Maryland - Eastern Shore <p>Massachusetts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ American International College ▶ Boston University ▶ MGH Institute of Health Professions ▶ Northeastern University ▶ Simmons College ▶ Springfield College ▶ University of Massachusetts Lowell <p>Michigan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Andrews University ▶ Central Michigan University ▶ Grand Valley State University ▶ Oakland University ▶ University of Michigan - Flint ▶ Wayne State University <p>Minnesota</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ College of St. Catherine ▶ College of St. Scholastica ▶ Mayo School of Health Sciences ▶ University of Minnesota <p>Mississippi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Mississippi at the Medical Center <p>Missouri</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Maryville University of Saint Louis ▶ Missouri State University ▶ Rockhurst University ▶ Saint Louis University ▶ Southwest Baptist University ▶ University of Missouri-Columbia ▶ Washington University of St Louis <p>Montana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The University of Montana - Missoula 	<p>South Dakota</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of South Dakota <p>Tennessee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Belmont University ▶ East Tennessee State University ▶ Tennessee State University ▶ The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga ▶ The University of Tennessee Health Science Center <p>Texas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Angelo State University ▶ Hardin-Simmons University ▶ Texas State University-San Marcos ▶ Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center ▶ Texas Woman's University ▶ The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio ▶ The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston ▶ University of Texas at El Paso ▶ University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas ▶ US Army-Baylor University <p>Utah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Utah <p>Vermont</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Vermont <p>Virginia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hampton University ▶ Marymount University ▶ Old Dominion University ▶ Shenandoah University ▶ Virginia Commonwealth University <p>Washington</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Eastern Washington University ▶ University of Puget Sound ▶ University of Washington <p>West Virginia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ West Virginia University ▶ Wheeling Jesuit University <p>Wisconsin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Carroll College ▶ Concordia University Wisconsin ▶ Marquette University ▶ University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse ▶ University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Day in the Life

Physical therapists practice in hospitals, clinics, and private offices that have specially equipped facilities. They also treat patients in hospital rooms, homes, or schools.

These jobs can be physically demanding because therapists often have to stoop, kneel, crouch, lift, and stand for long periods. In addition, physical therapists move heavy equipment and lift patients or help them turn, stand, or walk.



Most full-time physical therapists work a 40-hour week; some work evenings and weekends to fit their patients' schedules. About 1 in 5 physical therapists work part time.

Earnings

The median annual earnings of physical therapists is about \$66,200. The middle 50 percent earned between \$55,030 and \$78,080. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$46,510, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$94,810. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of physical therapists are:



Home health care services	\$70,920
Nursing care facilities	\$68,650
General medical and surgical hospitals	\$66,630
Offices of physicians	\$65,900
Offices of physical, occupational and speech therapists, and audiologists	\$65,150

Employment

Physical therapists hold about 173,000 jobs in the United States. The number of jobs is greater than the number of practicing physical therapists because some physical therapists hold two or more jobs. For example, some may work in a private practice, but also work part time in another health care facility. About 6 out of 10 physical therapists work in hospitals or in offices of physical therapists. Other jobs were in the home health care services industry, nursing care facilities, outpatient care centers, and offices of physicians. Some physical therapists were self-employed in private practices, seeing individual patients and contracting to provide services in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing care facilities, home health care agencies, adult day care programs, and schools. Physical therapists also teach in academic institutions and conduct research.

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Career Path Forecast

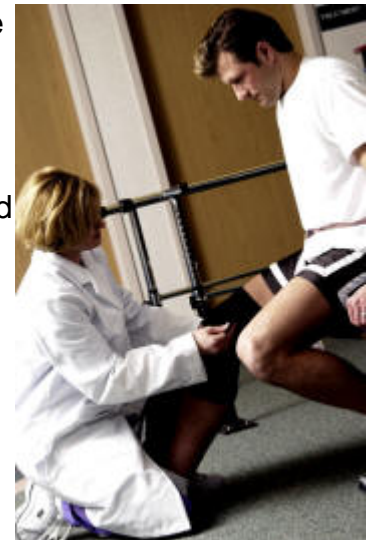
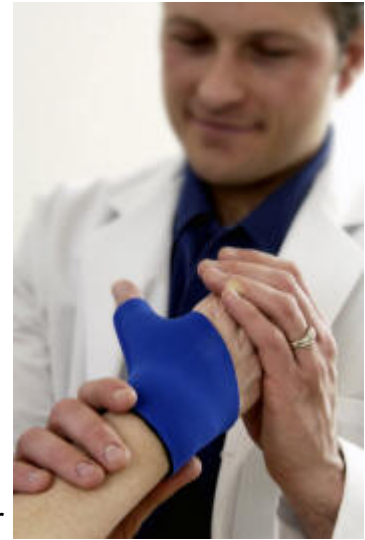
According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of physical therapists is expected to grow 27 percent from 2006 to 2016, much faster than the average for all occupations.

The impact of proposed Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the short-term job outlook for physical therapists. However, the long-run demand for physical therapists should continue to rise as new treatments and techniques expand the scope of physical therapy practices. Moreover, demand will be spurred by the increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities or limited function.

The increasing elderly population will drive growth in the demand for physical therapy services. The elderly population is particularly vulnerable to chronic and debilitating conditions that require therapeutic services. Also, the baby-boom generation is entering the prime age for heart attacks and strokes, increasing the demand for cardiac and physical rehabilitation. And increasing numbers of children will need physical therapy as technological advances save the lives of a larger proportion of newborns with severe birth defects.

Future medical developments also should permit a higher percentage of trauma victims to survive, creating additional demand for rehabilitative care. In addition, growth may result from advances in medical technology that could permit the treatment of an increasing number of disabling conditions that were untreatable in the past. Widespread interest in health promotion also should increase demand for physical therapy services. A growing number of employers are using physical therapists to evaluate worksites, develop exercise programs, and teach safe work habits to employees.

Job opportunities will be good for licensed physical therapists in all settings. Job opportunities should be particularly good in acute hospital, rehabilitation, and orthopedic settings, where the elderly are most often treated. Physical therapists with specialized knowledge of particular types of treatment also will have excellent job prospects.



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Professional Organizations

Professional societies provide an excellent means of keeping current and in touch with other professionals in the field. These groups can play a key role in your development and keep you abreast of what is happening in your field.

Associations promote the interests of their members and provide a network of contacts that can help you find jobs and move your career forward. They can offer a variety of services including job referral services, continuing education courses, insurance, travel benefits, periodicals, and meeting and conference opportunities. The following is a partial list of professional associations serving physical therapists. A broad list of professional associations is available at www.careercornerstone.org.



► **American Physical Therapy Association (www.apta.org)**

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is a national professional organization representing more than 71,000 members. Its goal is to foster advancements in physical therapy practice, research, and education.

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