



Physical Therapist Assistant Overview

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The Field

Physical therapist assistants help physical therapists to provide treatment that improves patient mobility, relieves pain, and prevents or lessens physical disabilities of patients.

A physical therapist might ask an assistant to help patients exercise or learn to use crutches, for example, or an aide to gather and prepare therapy equipment. Patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as lower-back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

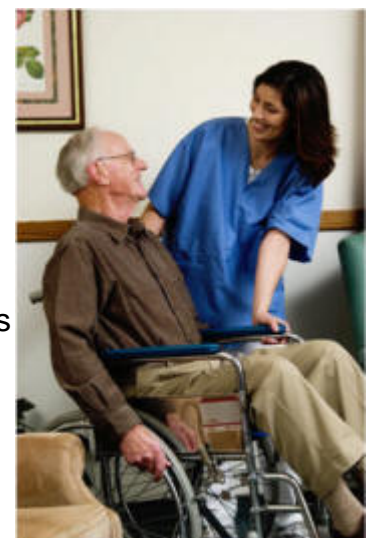
Physical therapist assistants perform a variety of tasks. Under the direction and supervision of physical therapists, they provide part of a patient's treatment. This might involve exercises, massages, electrical stimulation, paraffin baths, hot and cold packs, traction, and ultrasound. Physical therapist assistants record the patient's responses to treatment and report the outcome of each treatment to the physical therapist. The extent to which an assistant performs clerical tasks depends on the size and location of the facility.



Preparation

Most physical therapist assistants earn an associate degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program. In many States, physical therapist assistants are required by law to hold at least an associate degree.

Programs are divided into academic study and hands-on clinical experience. Academic course work includes algebra, anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry, and psychology. Clinical work includes certifications in CPR and other first aid and field experience in treatment centers. Both educators and prospective employers view clinical experience as essential to ensuring that students understand the responsibilities of a physical therapist assistant.



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Some states require licensure or registration in order to work as a physical therapist assistant. States that require licensure stipulate specific educational and examination criteria. Additional requirements may include certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other first aid and a minimum number of hours of clinical experience. Complete information on regulations can be obtained from State licensing boards.

Some physical therapist aides advance to become therapist assistants after gaining experience and additional education. 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.



► Accredited Programs

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education accredits programs for the physical therapist assistant at the associate degree level. There are currently here are 233 accredited physical therapist assistant programs in the United States. Accredited programs usually last 2 years, or 4 semesters, and culminate in an associate degree. The following table provides links to currently accredited physical therapy assistant programs.

<p>Alabama</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Bishop State Community College ► George C Wallace Community College ► Jefferson State Community College ► South University ► Wallace State Community College - Hanceville <p>Arizona</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► GateWay Community College ► Pima Medical Institute/Tucson Campus <p>Arkansas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Arkansas State University ► NorthWest Arkansas Community College ► South Arkansas Community College <p>California</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Cerritos College ► Loma Linda University ► Ohlone College ► Sacramento City College ► San Diego Mesa College <p>Colorado</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Arapahoe Community College ► Morgan Community College ► Pima Medical Institute/Denver Campus ► Pueblo Community College <p>Connecticut</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Naugatuck Valley Community College in Consortium with Capital, Housatonic, Manchester, Northwestern Connecticut, and Tunxis Community Technical Colleges 	<p>Nebraska</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Clarkson College ► Northeast Community College <p>Nevada</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► College of Southern Nevada <p>New Hampshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Hesser College ► New Hampshire Community Technical College - Claremont <p>New Jersey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Essex County College ► Mercer County Community College ► Union County College <p>New Mexico</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► San Juan College <p>New York</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Broome Community College ► Genesee Community College ► Herkimer County Community College ► Kingsborough Comm. College/The City Univ. of New York ► LaGuardia Community College ► Nassau Community College ► Niagara County Community College ► Onondaga Community College ► Orange County Community College ► State University of New York College of Technology at Canton ► Suffolk County Community College ► Touro College ► Villa Maria College of Buffalo <p>North Carolina</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute ► Central Piedmont Community College
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<p>Delaware</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Delaware Technical and Community College - Jack F Owens Campus ▶ Delaware Technical and Community College - Wilmington Campus <p>Florida</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Broward Community College ▶ Central Florida Community College ▶ Daytona Beach Community College ▶ Florida Community College at Jacksonville ▶ Gulf Coast Community College ▶ Indian River Community College ▶ Keiser University ▶ Lake City Community College ▶ Manatee Community College ▶ Miami Dade College ▶ Pensacola Junior College ▶ Polk Community College ▶ Seminole Community College ▶ South University ▶ St. Petersburg College <p>Georgia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Athens Technical College ▶ Darton College ▶ South University <p>Hawaii</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kapi'olani Community College - University of Hawaii <p>Idaho</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Idaho State University - College of Technology <p>Illinois</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Black Hawk College ▶ College of DuPage ▶ Illinois Central College ▶ Kaskaskia College ▶ Lake Land College ▶ Morton College ▶ Oakton Community College ▶ Southern Illinois University ▶ Southwestern Illinois College <p>Indiana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Brown Mackie College - South Bend ▶ Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana ▶ Ivy Tech State College, Northwest ▶ University of Evansville ▶ University of Indianapolis ▶ University of Saint Francis ▶ Vincennes University <p>Iowa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Indian Hills Community College ▶ Kirkwood Community College ▶ North Iowa Area Community College ▶ Western Iowa Tech Community College <p>Kansas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Colby Community College ▶ Kansas City Kansas Community College ▶ Washburn University of Topeka 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fayetteville Technical Community College ▶ Guilford Technical Community College ▶ Martin Community College ▶ Nash Community College ▶ South College-Asheville ▶ Southwestern Community College <p>North Dakota</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Williston State College <p>Ohio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clark State Community College ▶ Cuyahoga Community College ▶ Hocking College ▶ James A Rhodes State College ▶ Kent State University-Ashtabula ▶ Kent State University-East Liverpool ▶ Lorain County Community College ▶ Marion Technical College ▶ North Central State College ▶ Owens Community College ▶ Professional Skills Institute ▶ Shawnee State University ▶ Sinclair Community College ▶ Stark State College of Technology ▶ University of Cincinnati ▶ Washington State Community College ▶ Zane State College <p>Oklahoma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Carl Albert State College ▶ Murray State College ▶ Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College ▶ Oklahoma City Community College ▶ Southwestern Oklahoma State University/Caddo-Kiowa Technology Center ▶ Tulsa Community College <p>Oregon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mount Hood Community College <p>Pennsylvania</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Butler County Community College ▶ California University of Pennsylvania ▶ Central Pennsylvania College ▶ Comm. College of Allegheny Cnty/Boyce Campus ▶ Harcum College ▶ Lehigh Carbon Community College ▶ Mercyhurst College ▶ Mount Aloysius College ▶ The Pennsylvania State University DuBois ▶ The Pennsylvania State University Hazleton Campus ▶ The Pennsylvania State University Mont Alto ▶ The Pennsylvania State University Shenango ▶ University of Pittsburgh at Titusville <p>Puerto Rico</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ University of Puerto Rico at Humacao ▶ University of Puerto Rico in Ponce <p>Rhode Island</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Community College of Rhode Island <p>South Carolina</p>
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<p>Kentucky</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hazard Community & Technical College and Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College ▶ Jefferson Community and Technical College ▶ Madisonville Community College ▶ Somerset Community College ▶ West Kentucky Community and Technical College <p>Louisiana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Bossier Parish Community College ▶ Delgado Community College ▶ Our Lady of the Lake College <p>Maine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kennebec Valley Community College <p>Maryland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Allegany College of Maryland ▶ Baltimore City Community College ▶ Carroll Community College ▶ Chesapeake Area Consortium for Higher Education: Anne Arundel Community College, College of Southern Maryland, and Chesapeake College ▶ Montgomery College - Takoma Park Campus <p>Massachusetts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Bay State College ▶ Berkshire Community College ▶ Massachusetts Bay Community College ▶ Mount Wachusett Community College ▶ North Shore Community College ▶ Springfield Technical Community College <p>Michigan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Baker College of Flint ▶ Baker College of Muskegon ▶ Delta College ▶ Finlandia University ▶ Henry Ford Community College ▶ Kellogg Community College ▶ Macomb Community College ▶ Mott Community College <p>Minnesota</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Anoka Ramsey Community College ▶ College of St. Catherine ▶ Lake Superior College <p>Mississippi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hinds Community College ▶ Itawamba Community College ▶ Meridian Community College ▶ Pearl River Community College/Hattiesburg Branch <p>Missouri</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Linn State Technical College ▶ Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley ▶ Missouri Western State University ▶ Ozarks Technical Community College ▶ St. Louis Community College at Meramec <p>Montana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Montana State University - Great Falls College of Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greenville Technical College ▶ Midlands Technical College ▶ Trident Technical College <p>South Dakota</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lake Area Technical Institute <p>Tennessee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Chattanooga State Technical Community College ▶ Jackson State Community College ▶ Roane State Community College ▶ South College ▶ Southwest Tennessee Community College ▶ Volunteer State Community College ▶ Walters State Community College <p>Texas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Amarillo College ▶ Austin Community College ▶ Blinn College ▶ Community College of the Air Force ▶ Del Mar College ▶ El Paso Community College ▶ Houston Community College System ▶ Kilgore College ▶ Laredo Community College ▶ McLennan Community College ▶ North Harris Montgomery Community College District - Montgomery College ▶ Northeast Texas Community College ▶ Odessa College ▶ San Jacinto College South ▶ South Texas College ▶ St. Philip's College ▶ Tarrant County College ▶ Wharton County Junior College <p>Utah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provo College ▶ Salt Lake Community College <p>Virginia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Jefferson College of Health Sciences ▶ Northern Virginia Community College ▶ Tidewater Community College ▶ Wytheville Community College <p>Washington</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Green River Community College ▶ Spokane Falls Community College ▶ Whatcom Community College <p>West Virginia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Marshall Community & Technical College ▶ Mountain State University ▶ Pierpont Community & Technical College of Fairmont State University <p>Wisconsin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Blackhawk Technical College ▶ Gateway Technical College ▶ Milwaukee Area Technical College ▶ Northeast Wisconsin Technical College ▶ Western Technical College
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Day in the Life

The hours and days that physical therapist assistants work vary with the facility. About 23 percent of all physical therapist assistants work part time. Many outpatient physical therapy offices and clinics have evening and weekend hours, to coincide with patients' personal schedules.

Physical therapist assistants should be well-organized, detail oriented, and caring. They usually have strong interpersonal skills and a desire to help people in need.

Physical therapist assistants need a moderate degree of strength because of the physical exertion required in assisting patients with their treatment. In some cases, assistants and aides need to lift patients. Frequent kneeling, stooping, and standing for long periods also are part of the job.

Some physical therapist assistants decide to specialize in a clinical area. They gain expertise in treating a certain type of patient, such as geriatric or pediatric, or a type of ailment, such as sports injuries.

Many physical therapist assistants advance to administration positions. These positions might include organizing all the assistants in a large physical therapy organization or acting as the director for a specific department such as sports medicine. Other assistants go on to teach in an accredited physical therapist assistant academic program, lead health risk reduction classes for the elderly, or organize community activities related to fitness and risk reduction.



Earnings

The median annual earnings of physical therapist assistants is about \$41,360. The middle 50 percent earn between \$33,840 and \$49,010. The lowest 10 percent earn less than \$26,190, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$57,220.

Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of physical therapist assistants are:

Home health care services	\$46,390
Nursing care facilities	\$44,460
Offices of physical, occupational and speech therapists, and audiologists	\$40,780
General medical and surgical hospitals	\$40,670
Offices of physicians	\$39,290



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Employment

Physical therapist assistants hold about 60,000 jobs in the United States. They work with physical therapists in a variety of settings.

About 71 percent of jobs are in offices of physical therapists or in hospitals. Others work primarily in nursing care facilities, offices of physicians, home health care services, and outpatient care centers.



Career Path Forecast

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment is expected to grow much faster than average because of increasing consumer demand for physical therapy services.

Job prospects for physical therapist assistants are expected to be very good. Employment of physical therapist assistants is expected to grow by 29 percent over the 2006-16 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations.

The impact of Federal limits on Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the short-term job outlook for physical therapist assistants. However, long-term demand for physical therapist assistants and aides will continue to rise, as the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function grows.



The increasing number of people who need therapy reflects, in part, the increasing elderly population. The elderly population is particularly vulnerable to chronic and debilitating conditions that require therapeutic services. These patients often need additional assistance in their treatment, making the roles of assistants and aides vital. In addition, the large baby-boom generation is entering the prime age for heart attacks and strokes, further increasing the demand for cardiac and physical rehabilitation. Moreover, future medical developments should permit an increased percentage of trauma victims to survive, creating added demand for therapy services. Physical therapists are expected to increasingly use assistants to reduce the cost of physical therapy services. Once a patient is evaluated and a treatment plan is designed by the physical therapist, the physical therapist assistant can provide many parts of the treatment, as approved by the therapist.



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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 therapist assistants. 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. There are also special resources for PTA's on the APTA site.

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