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Physical Therapist

Overview

Physical Therapists (PTs) provide services that help restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients with injuries or disease. PTs work closely with patients to restore, maintain, and promote their overall fitness and health. Patients may include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as low back pain, fractures, head injuries, arthritis, heart disease, and cerebral palsy.

PTs examine patients' medical histories, then test and measure their strength, range of motion, balance and coordination, posture, muscle performance, respiration, and motor function. They also determine the patient's ability to be independent and reintegrate into the community or workplace after injury or illness. Finally, they develop treatment plans describing a treatment strategy, its purpose, and the anticipated outcome.

To meet a physical therapist (<http://science.education.nih.gov/LifeWorks.nsf/Interviews/Matthew+Scherer>), see the NIH "Lifeworks" (<http://science.education.nih.gov/LifeWorks.nsf/feature/index.htm>) website. For more information on pursuing a career in this field, see the [American Physical Therapy Association](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Career_as_PT_PTA&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=242&ContentID=31095) (http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Career_as_PT_PTA&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=242&ContentID=31095) website.

Working Conditions

Many Physical Therapists practice in hospitals, clinics, and private offices with specially-equipped facilities, although some PTs treat patients in hospital rooms, homes, or schools. Most full-time PTs work a 40-hour week, which may include some evenings and weekends.

This job 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.

Academic Requirements

All [accredited PT schools](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?section=PT_Programs&template=/aptaapps/accreditedschools/acc_schools_map.cfm&process=3&type=PT) (http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?section=PT_Programs&template=/aptaapps/accreditedschools/acc_schools_map.cfm&process=3&type=PT) offer degrees at the master's degree level and above, in accordance with the [Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CAPTE1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=65&ContentID=20194) (<http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CAPTE1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=65&ContentID=20194>). Today, more than half of the PT programs in the U.S. offer a [Doctor of Physical Therapy \(DPT\) degree](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Post_Professional_Degree&CONTENTID=23590&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm) (http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Post_Professional_Degree&CONTENTID=23590&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm).

For more information on available Physical Therapy educational programs, see the [American Physical Therapy Association \(APTA\)](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Education_Programs1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=105&ContentID=21332) (http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Education_Programs1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=105&ContentID=21332) Website.

Professional Associations

American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) (<http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>)

APTA Student Assembly (<http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>)

Funding Opportunities

Search for funding opportunities in this field (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>)

Enrichment Programs

Search for enrichment programs in this field (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>)

Source

www.apta.org

Learn more about this field:

Physical Therapy (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.com/en/Field.12.aspx>)

Average Salary: \$68,000

Years in school: 6 - 9 *

Job outlook: Excellent

* after high school graduation

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