

PHYSICAL THERAPIST



JOB DESCRIPTION

Physical therapists play a vital part in treating people with physical difficulties resulting from injury, illness, disability, or aging. A physical therapist uses treatments including massage, hydrotherapy, and exercise to help patients recover or manage their condition. They may work in private practices, or in hospitals alongside other health care experts, such as doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, and social workers.



SALARY

Physical therapy assistant ★★★★★
Physical therapist ★★★★★

INDUSTRY PROFILE

Strong competition • Most jobs in outpatient clinics, hospitals, and schools • Growing demand for sports physical therapists and private practitioners

AT A GLANCE



YOUR INTERESTS Physical therapy • Massage • Exercise • Health and social service • Sports • Biology • Anatomy • Health science • Psychology



ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS A doctorate in physical therapy is required, along with a commitment to ongoing education throughout your career.



LIFESTYLE Physical therapists typically have a normal workweek, although some clinics are open in the evening and on weekends.



LOCATION Most therapists work in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and outpatient practices. Home visits are also possible.



THE REALITIES Treating patients over several weeks or months can be physically and mentally demanding, but rewarding when patients show improvement.

CAREER PATHS

Physical therapists have several career options. They could work in a hospital or choose one of the specialty areas within the profession. Clinical experience in physical therapy may open up a career in hospital or health service management, or in teaching. Many physical therapists also move into private practice once they have gained extensive experience.

ASSISTANT You can start by assisting a qualified physical therapist while studying for your bachelor's degree.



GRADUATE Before practicing, you must graduate from an accredited doctoral program, pass the national physical therapy exam, and apply for a license in the state in which you want to work.



▼ RELATED CAREERS

- ▶ **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST** *see pp. 292–293*
- ▶ **PERSONAL TRAINER** *see pp. 300–301*
- ▶ **MASSAGE THERAPIST** Uses massage to ease the aches and pains of patients and clients, treat specific muscular problems—such as spasms and sprains—or enhance their general well-being. Massage therapists also use their skills to provide rehabilitation or relief to people with long-term illnesses or sports injuries.
- ▶ **SPORTS SCIENTIST** Applies a science-based knowledge of sports and human biology to work with athletes, doctors, and other health care professionals. They help athletes improve their performance and take better care of their bodies. They also conduct research in health and sports.

SKILLS GUIDE



Effective communication with a wide range of patients and health care workers.



The ability to work in teams alongside a range of other health care professionals.



Empathy and sensitivity in understanding patients' problems to provide the right treatment.



Problem-solving skills to diagnose and treat conditions, which may require technical equipment.



Physical strength and stamina to carry out massage treatments on patients.

ORTHOPEDIC PHYSICAL THERAPIST Assesses and treats patients recovering from surgery, accidents, or other injuries.



GERIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPIST Specializes in helping elderly patients improve their mobility, adjust to living at home after surgery, or manage pain from medical conditions such as arthritis.



PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPIST Works with children to address physical problems and in rehabilitation after surgery or accidents.



PHYSICAL THERAPIST
Once working as a qualified physical therapist, you can take specific courses to expand your skills and knowledge.



SPORTS PHYSICAL THERAPIST
Treats a range of sports-related injuries. They also offer guidance on prevention of injury, fitness programs, and nutrition.



NEUROSCIENCE PHYSICAL THERAPIST Assesses and treats patients after stroke, spinal cord injury, or traumatic brain injury. Helps to retrain the brain.

