Physical Therapy

Physical therapists, sometimes called PTs, help injured or ill people improve their movement and manage their pain.

Taken from the Occupational Outlook Handbook

Trends
The number of available positions for physical therapist is expected to grow by 36% by 2022, which is much faster than average for all fields. The anticipated growth in the field is partially attributed to the growing population of older individuals who stay active and the rise in chronic health conditions that may require physical therapy. Many physical therapists work in therapy offices (33%) or hospitals (28%); others work in home healthcare (11%), nursing facilities (7%), or physicians’ offices (5%).

Education & Training
A doctoral degree in physical therapy (DPT), which typically takes 3 years to complete, is the standard credential in the field. All states require physical therapists to be licensed. While DPT programs, undergraduate coursework in the sciences is an admissions requirement.

DPT programs include courses in anatomy and physiology, pharmacology, and biomechanics; before graduation, students complete clinical experiences in physical therapy settings.

Tips for Breaking In
- Gain experience in the field through volunteering, job shadowing, and research; seek work as a physical therapy assistant.
- Develop strong communication skills and the ability to work with a diverse group of people.
- Maintain good grades to qualify for graduate programs.
- Join relevant professional associations or student associations.
- Research graduate school programs to learn what is expected and needed to get into the field.
- Become familiar with state licensing requirements.

Licenses & Certifications
All states require that physical therapists be licensed to practice in the field. Licensure typically requires a DPT degree and passing scores on an exam. In North Carolina, physical therapists must have a degree in the field, a passing score on both the National Physical Therapy Exam and jurisprudence exercise.

Experienced physical therapists can obtain a certification in a specialty area, such as geriatrics, pediatrics, sports, or women’s health.

Earnings
The median salary (2014) for physical therapists was $82,390. About 25% of physical therapists work part-time.

Types of Employers

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Example Employers
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Carolina Medical Center
National Institutes of Health
Aegis Therapies
Lake Norman Regional Medical Center
Mecklenburg Health & Rehabilitation Center

Desirable Qualities, Interests, and Skills
- Interest in having a physically active career, since physical therapists spend much of the day working hands-on with patients.
- Ability to motivate others.
- Compassion and sensitivity to patient needs.
- Problem-solving, critical thinking, and analytical skills.
- High ethical standards.
- Affinity for the sciences.
- Ability to explain complex concepts and techniques.

Websites
American Physical Therapy Association | www.apta.org
North Carolina Physical Therapy Association | www.ncpt.org
Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy | www.fsbpt.org
North Carolina Board of Physical Therapy Examiners | www.ncptboard.org
Explore Health Careers: Physical Therapy | www.explorehealthcareers.org
UNC Charlotte’s Pre-Health Professional Advising | honorscollege.uncc.edu/advising
Move Forward | www.moveforwardpt.com

Sample Job Titles

- Physical Therapist
- Home Care Physical Therapist
- Pediatric Physical Therapist
- Rehabilitation Therapist
- Clinical Specialist
- Registered Physical Therapist
- Rehabilitation Services Director
- Staff Physical Therapist

Job market, salary, and other information on the How to Get a Job In… series is from O*Net Online and the Bureau of Labor Statistics’s Occupational Outlook Handbook.