



PHYSICAL THERAPIST



A brief educational and career guide prepared by:

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What is a Physical Therapist?

Physical therapists, or PTs, are health care professionals who evaluate and treat people with health problems resulting from injury or disease. PTs assess joint motion, muscle strength and endurance, function of heart and lungs, and performance of activities required in daily living, among other responsibilities. Treatment includes therapeutic exercise, cardiovascular endurance training, and training in activities of daily living. Although many physical therapists practice in hospitals, more than 70 percent practice in private physical therapy offices, community health centers, industrial health centers, sports facilities, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, home health agencies, schools or pediatric centers; work in research institutions; or teach in colleges and universities.

Physical therapists may now choose to become certified as clinical specialists in one of seven specialty areas: cardiopulmonary, clinical electrophysiology, geriatrics, neurology, orthopaedics, pediatrics, and sports physical therapy. A physical therapist may be eligible for specialty certification only after several years of clinical experience.

How Do I Become a PT?

After graduation from an accredited PT program, candidates must pass a state-administered national exam for licensure. Other requirements for physical therapy practice vary from state to state according to physical therapy practice acts or state regulations governing physical therapy.

Programs

Although the type of credential awarded to a graduate of a PT program does not directly affect the PT's employment opportunity or salary, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) advocates a master's degree as the terminal degree for PTs and the highest level of achievement is the Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT). There are currently 209 accredited PT programs of which 152 (72.7%) are accredited to award the DPT degree. Master's and Doctorate level PT programs take anywhere from 2 to 4 years to complete, depending on the specific requirements of the program. All programs consist of basic and clinical medical science courses as well as clinical rotations/ internships, and many programs have a research component as well.

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Admissions Requirements

Admissions requirements can vary widely from school to school, but generally master's and DPT programs expect a BA or BS with the following undergraduate curriculum:

- 1 year Anatomy and Physiology with lab (ZOOL 507-508 or ANSC 511-512)
- 1 year Biology with lab (BIOL 411-412)
- 1 year Chemistry with lab (CHEM 403-404)
- 1 year Physics with lab (PHYS 401-402 or PHYS 407-408)
- 1 year Psychology (Abnormal and Developmental Psychology are often required)
- 1 year English
- 1 semester statistics

Some programs require exercise physiology, computer science, foreign language study, or additional coursework in the humanities or social sciences. An applicant's undergraduate major is not a factor in admission, so students may complete these prerequisites as major requirements, general education requirements, or as electives. Many PT programs expect applicants to have had significant exposure to the profession, either through observation or volunteering. Students should consult the American Physical Therapy Association web page (www.APTA.org) for listings of educational programs and contact individual schools to determine the specific requirements of the programs that they are interested in.

Master's and DPT programs often require the GRE exam. The MCAT is not required. Since there is no central application service for PT programs, applications should be requested directly from the schools themselves. Deadlines for application generally fall between December and February and most programs begin sometime between May and September.

Further Information

The most current source of information is the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the unifying professional association for PTs. Contact the APTA at:

APTA
1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
Phone: 800- 999-2782
Web: www.APTA.org

Sources: Most of the information in this brochure was taken from APTA literature.