

PHYSICAL THERAPY AIDE OR ASSISTANT

Entry Level: High School Diploma or Associate's Degree

Physical therapist assistants work under the direction and supervision of physical therapists. They help patients who are recovering from injuries and illnesses regain movement and manage pain.² Physical therapy aides are often much more restricted in their responsibilities due to their limited education. Tasks include helping patients into or out of the therapy area, cleaning treatment areas, washing linens, and the handling of clerical tasks.¹

JOB REQUIREMENTS

What is the exact job title?

- Physical Therapy Aide
- Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA)

How do I become one?

- PT Aides typically have a high school diploma or the equivalent.¹
 - They usually gain clinical experience through on-the-job training that can last from about a week to a month. Employers often prefer to hire applicants with computer skills.
- PT Assistants are required to have an associate degree from a PT Assistant program, accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).¹
 - These programs can be found on the CAPTE website under “Directory of Programs” (<http://www.capteonline.org/home.aspx>).
 - In an associate degree program, students gain the knowledge and skills they need to assist Physical Therapists as they work on patients. Students learn the fundamentals of the profession through both classroom instruction and practical training with a licensed Physical Therapist.³
 - Must pass the National Physical Therapy Exam from the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (<https://www.fsbpt.org/>).¹

What qualities do I need?

- **Compassion:** PT assistants and aides should enjoy helping people. They work with people who are in pain, and they must have empathy to help their patients.²
- **Detail oriented:** Like other healthcare professionals, PT assistants and aides should be organized and have a keen eye for detail. They must keep accurate records and follow written and verbal instructions carefully to ensure quality care.²
- **Dexterity:** PT assistants should be comfortable using their hands to provide manual therapy and therapeutic exercises. Aides should also be comfortable working with their hands to set up equipment and prepare treatment areas.²
- **Interpersonal skills:** PT assistants and aides spend much of their time interacting with patients, their families, and other healthcare practitioners; therefore, they should be courteous and friendly.²

¹<https://www.physicaltherapyaide.org/physical-therapy-aides-and-assistants-the-differences-and-similarities/>

²<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapist-assistants-and-aides.htm>

³<https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/physical-therapist/>

⁴https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Physical_Therapy_Aide/Hourly_Rate

⁵<https://www.physicaltherapyaide.org/salary-and-career-information-for-physical-therapy-aides/>

⁶<http://www.cf.edu/explore/programs/health/pta/a-day-in-the-life/index>

- Physical stamina: PT assistants and aides must often kneel, stoop, bend, and stand for long periods. They should enjoy physical activity.²

TYPICAL WORK DAY

What do they do?

- Physical therapist assistants, sometimes called *PTAs*, and physical therapist aides work under the direction and supervision of physical therapists. They help patients who are recovering from injuries and illnesses regain movement and manage pain. Physical therapist assistants are involved in the direct care of patients. Physical therapist aides often do tasks that are indirectly related to patient care, such as cleaning and setting up the treatment area, moving patients, and performing clerical duties.²
- The physical therapist assistants are directly involved in patient treatment. They carry out the physical therapy interventions as set out in the Plan of Care by the PT. Each PTA is responsible for reporting to the supervising PT on a regular basis about the patient's progress.⁶

Where do they normally work?

- Nursing care facilities, home healthcare services, hospitals, offices of physical, occupational and speech therapists, and offices of audiologists and physicians.²

What hours do they work?

- Aides and Assistants usually work full-time, sometimes working evening or weekend hours to match patient's schedules. Having a flexible schedule allows for more hours.⁵

BENEFITS

What is a typical salary in this field?

- Physical Therapy Aide: \$26,240²
- Physical Therapy Assistant: \$48,090²

Does this job come with any benefits? (vision, dental, 401k, PTO, etc.)

- PT Aide:
 - Medical: 43%⁴
 - Vision: 26%⁴
 - Dental: 32%⁴
 - None: 56%⁴
- PT Assistant:
 - Medical: 68%⁴
 - Vision: 46%⁴
 - Dental: 56%⁴
 - None: 30%⁴

GROWTH

What is the projected job growth?

- Between 2018 - 2028, job growth for PT Aides is projected to be 23%.²
- Between 2018 - 2028, job growth for PT Assistants is projected to be 27%.²

Last Updated: October 2019

1<https://www.physicaltherapyaide.org/physical-therapy-aides-and-assistants-the-differences-and-similarities/>
2<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapist-assistants-and-aides.htm>
3<https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/physical-therapist/>
4https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Physical_Therapy_Aide/Hourly_Rate
5<https://www.physicaltherapyaide.org/salary-and-career-information-for-physical-therapy-aides/>
6<http://www.cf.edu/explore/programs/health/pta/a-day-in-the-life/index>