

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Entry Level: Doctoral or Professional Degree

***Please Note:** BYU has Physical Therapy Advisement for students interested in becoming a practicing physical therapist: <https://ppa.byu.edu/physical-therapy>.

Physical therapists often work as part of a rehabilitation team to provide hands-on therapy, exercises and stretching maneuvers to patients with chronic conditions or serious injuries to ease pain and facilitate health and wellness. Other members of the health care team may include physical therapist assistants, aides, physicians and surgeons.¹

JOB REQUIREMENTS

What is the exact job title?

- Physical Therapist (PT)

How do I become one?

- Earn a bachelor's degree in a health-related field. Check with the doctoral degree program you plan to enroll in for specific prerequisite requirements.²
- Complete a Doctor of Physical Therapy Degree Program (most last 3 years).
 - Find one accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). These programs can be found through their website using the "Directory of Programs" (<http://www.capteonline.org/home.aspx>).²
 - It is often necessary to apply for DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy) programs through the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS). Students in DPT programs must complete a clinical internship in an area with supervised experience.² (<http://www.ptcas.org/home.aspx>).
- Meet your state's licensing requirements.²
 - All states require PTs to become licensed, including passing the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE), administered by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT).²
 - The NPTE is a computerized, multi-choice exam. Applicants may take the exam 3 times in a 12-month period.²
 - The Practice Exam and Assessment Tool (PEAT), developed by the FSBPT, allows applicants to practice taking the test using an example that resembles the NPTE. However, it is not free.² (<https://www.fsbpt.org/Our-Services/Candidate-Services/Practice-Exam-Assessment-Tool-PEAT>).
- (OPTIONAL) Complete a residency. Apply to a clinical residency program to gain additional training and experience in specialty areas of care (typically 1 year).²
- (OPTIONAL) Obtain board certification. After working in the field, PTs may apply to become a board-certified specialist in 1 of 8 clinical specialty areas offered by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties.²

1<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapists.htm>

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

3<https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/physical-therapy/physical-therapist/>

4[https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Physical_Therapist_\(PT\)/Salary](https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Physical_Therapist_(PT)/Salary)

What qualities do I need?

- **Compassion:** PTs are often drawn to the profession in part by a desire to help people. They work with people who are in pain and must have empathy for their patients.¹
- **Detail oriented:** Like other healthcare providers, PTs should have strong analytic and observational skills to diagnose a patient's problem, evaluate treatments, and provide safe, effective care.¹
- **Dexterity:** PTs must use their hands to provide manual therapy and therapeutic exercises. They should feel comfortable massaging and otherwise physically assisting patients.¹
- **Interpersonal skills:** Because PTs spend a lot of time interacting with patients, they should enjoy working with people. They must clearly explain treatment programs, motivate patients, and listen to patients' concerns in order to provide effective therapy.¹
- **Physical stamina:** PTs spend much of their time on their feet, moving as they demonstrate proper techniques and help patients perform exercises. They should enjoy physical activity.¹
- **Resourcefulness:** PTs customize treatment plans for patients. They must be flexible and adapt plans of care to meet the needs of each patient.¹
- **Time-management skills:** PTs typically treat several patients each day. They must provide appropriate care to patients along with completing administrative tasks, such as documenting patient progress.¹

TYPICAL WORK DAY

What do they do?

- Physical therapists typically do the following:
 - Review patients' medical history and any referrals or notes from doctors, surgeons, or other healthcare workers.¹
 - Diagnose patients' functions and movements by observing them stand or walk and by listening to their concerns, among other methods.¹
 - Develop individualized plans of care for patients, outlining the patients' goals and the expected outcomes of the plans.¹
 - Use exercises, stretching maneuvers, hands-on therapy, and equipment to ease patients' pain, help them increase their mobility, prevent further pain or injury, and facilitate health and wellness.¹
 - Evaluate and record a patient's progress, modifying a plan of care and trying new treatments as needed.¹
 - Educate patients and their families about what to expect from the recovery process and how best to cope with challenges throughout the process.¹

Where do they normally work?

- Physical therapists typically work in private offices and clinics, hospitals, patients' homes, and nursing homes. They spend much of their time on their feet, actively working with patients.¹

What hours do they work?

- Most physical therapists work a regular Monday-to-Friday work week. Depending on the work setting, however, some may need to work evenings or weekends.³

BENEFITS

What is a typical salary in this field?

- BLS: In May 2018, median pay was \$42.27/hour or \$87,930/year.¹

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- Payscale: \$38.97/hour or \$70,568/year.⁴

Does this job come with any benefits?

- Medical: 79%³
- Vision: 51%³
- Dental: 63%³
- None: 20%³

GROWTH

What is the projected job growth?

- Between 2018 - 2028, job growth is projected to be 22%.¹

Last Updated: October 2019

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