

RECREATIONAL THERAPIST

Entry Level: Bachelor's Degree

***Please Note:** BYU Marriott School has a specific Therapeutic Recreation & Management program, separate from the Exercise Sciences and Exercise and Wellness degrees:

<https://marriottschool.byu.edu/trm/>.

Recreational therapists plan and implement recreational treatment programs for people with injuries, illnesses, and disabilities. They also help people develop social skills and manage anxiety and depression. Depending on a patient's needs and interests, recreational therapists may plan and lead activities involving arts and crafts, aquatics, music, games, sports and more.⁴

JOB REQUIREMENTS

What is the exact job title?

- Recreation Therapist
- Recreational Therapist PRN
- Therapeutic Recreation Technician

How do I become one?

- Complete a Bachelor's degree (BYU has a specific degree for this).²
- (Optional) Get certified – most employers prefer to hire certified recreational therapists. The NCTRC offers the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) credential. Candidates may qualify for certification through one of three pathways.²
 - The first option requires a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy, completion of a supervised internship of at least 560 hours, and passing an exam.²
 - The other options also require passing an exam but allow candidates with a bachelor's degree in an unrelated subject to qualify with various combinations of education and work experience.²
- Maintain certification - therapists must either pass an exam or complete work experience and continuing education requirements every 5 years.²

What qualities do I need?

- Compassion: Recreational therapists should be kind and empathetic when providing support to patients and their families. They may deal with patients who are in pain or under emotional stress.²
- Leadership skills: Recreational therapists must plan, develop, and implement intervention programs in an effective manner. They must be engaging and able to motivate patients to participate in a variety of therapeutic activities.²
- Listening skills: Recreational therapists must listen carefully to a patient's problems and concerns. They can then determine an appropriate course of treatment for that patient.
- Patience: Recreational therapists may work with some patients who require more time and special attention than others.²
- Resourcefulness: Recreational therapists customize treatment plans for patients. They must be both creative and flexible when adapting activities or programs to each patient's needs.²

1<https://cph.temple.edu/rs/therapeutic-recreation/what-therapeutic-recreation>

2<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/recreational-therapists.htm#tab-1>

3https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Recreational_Therapist/Hourly_Rate

4https://learn.org/articles/How_Can_I_Become_a_Recreational_Therapist.html

- **Speaking skills:** Recreational therapists need to communicate well with their patients. They must give clear directions during activities or instructions on healthy coping techniques.²

TYPICAL WORK DAY

What do they do?

- Recreational therapists engage patients in therapeutic activities, such as swimming.
- Recreational therapists plan, direct, and coordinate recreation-based treatment programs for people with disabilities, injuries, or illnesses. These therapists use a variety of modalities, including arts and crafts; drama, music, and dance; sports and games; aquatics; and community outings to help maintain or improve a patient's physical, social, and emotional well-being.²

Where do they normally work?

- Recreational therapists may work in mental health agencies, pediatric facilities, nursing homes, physical rehabilitation hospitals, adult day programs, substance recovery programs, community recreation centers, outdoor recreation centers, adult retirement communities, skilled nursing facilities, developmental disability centers, home health care, after school programs, assisted living centers, specialty schools for kids with hearing impairments, visual impairments and other physical and cognitive disabilities, Veterans Administration hospitals, or correctional facilities.¹

What hours do they work?

- Most recreational therapists work full time, although about 1 in 5 worked part time in 2016. Some recreational therapists work evenings and weekends to meet the needs of their patients.²

BENEFITS

What is a typical salary in this field?

- BLS: In 2018, the mean salary was \$23.01/hour or \$47,860/year.²
- Payscale: \$18.27/hour or \$39,988/year.³

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

- Medical: 77%³
- Vision: 54%³
- Dental: 65%³
- None: 20%³

GROWTH

What is the projected job growth?

- Between 2018-2028, job growth is projected to be 7%. Job prospects will be best for recreational therapists with both a bachelor's degree and certification. Therapists who specialize in working with older adults may have particularly good job opportunities. In addition, demand may be greater in highly populated areas, so recreational therapists who are willing to relocate may have favorable job prospects.³

Last Updated: October 2019

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