

Physical Therapist Assistant

Professional Activities

Physical therapist assistants work under the direction of physical therapists. They help patients who are recovering from injuries, illnesses, and surgeries regain movement and manage pain. Physical therapist assistants are involved in the direct care of patients.

Physical therapist assistants typically do the following:

- Observe patients before and during therapy, noting their status and reporting to a physical therapist
- Help patients do specific exercises
- Use a variety of techniques, such as massage and stretching, to treat patients
- Use devices and equipment, such as walkers, to help patients
- Educate a patient and family members about what to do after treatment

Physical therapist assistants help physical therapists provide care to patients. Under the direction and supervision of physical therapists, they give therapy through exercise; therapeutic methods, such as electrical stimulation, mechanical traction, and ultrasound; massage; and gait and balance training. Physical therapist assistants record patients' responses to treatment and report the results of each treatment to the physical therapist.

Educational Requirements

Most states require physical therapist assistants to have an associate's degree from an accredited physical therapist program. Programs are divided into academic coursework and clinical experience. Academic courses include algebra, English, anatomy and physiology, and psychology. Clinical work includes certifications in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other first aid and hands-on experience in treatment centers. Many physical therapist assistants and aides continue their formal education to qualify for jobs in administration, management, and education.

Most states require physical therapist assistants to be licensed. Licensure typically requires graduation from an accredited physical therapist assistant program and passing the Physical National Physical Therapy Exam. Some states require additional state-administered exams. In some states, physical therapist assistants also need to take continuing education courses. Check with your state licensing board.

Academic Programs

[Black Hawk College](#)

[Southwestern Illinois College](#)

[College of DuPage](#)

[Elgin Community College](#)

[Fox College](#)

[Illinois Central College](#)

[Kankakee Community College](#)

[Kaskaskia College](#)

[Lake Land College](#)

[Morton College](#)

[Oakton Community College](#)

[Southern Illinois University Carbondale](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$17.92	\$29.42	\$38.54
	Annual	\$37,280	\$61,180	\$80,170
Illinois	Hourly	\$17.80	\$29.69	\$37.66
	Annual	\$37,020	\$61,740	\$78,320

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Physical Therapist Assistants	96,500	122,100	27%	17,900
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Physical Therapist Assistants	3,850	4,670	+21%	590

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

American Physical Therapy Association (apta.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapist-assistants-and-aides.htm>)

O*Net OnLine (<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-2021.00>)

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