

Physical Therapist

Get people moving again after injury, surgery or stroke. Seven years of school for a job that exists in every town.

TYPICAL PAY

\$102,760

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$77k to \$135k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Outpatient clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, sports te...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and math. Start collecting observation hours in a clinic while you are still in school.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major, as long as you complete the prerequisite science courses. Exercise science, biology and kinesiology are the usual choices, and grades matter.
- 3 Doctor of Physical Therapy** 3 years
Three years at a program accredited by CAPTE (the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education). Roughly three quarters classroom and lab, one quarter clinical placement.
- 4 Clinical rotations** Within the doctorate
Full time supervised practice across settings such as outpatient, hospital, neurological and pediatric care.
- 5 National exam and state license** Months after graduation
Pass the National Physical Therapy Examination, then license with your state board, which may also set a law exam.

Pros and cons

- + Strong, stable pay from your first licensed day
- + Work in any town in the country, in many settings
- + You watch people recover something they had lost
- Seven to eight years and often more than \$100,000 of debt
- Pay rises slowly after the first few years
- Productivity targets and insurance paperwork grind people down

Optional boosts

Orthopedics. Neurologic therapy. Pediatrics. Geriatrics.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Physical Therapists (29-1123.00)
American Physical Therapy Association: becoming a physical therapist
Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education
Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy: the National Physical Therapy Examination

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/physical-therapist>

Good to know

Three quarters of the doctorate is classroom

The American Physical Therapy Association describes a typical Doctor of Physical Therapy program as about 77 percent classroom and laboratory work and about 23 percent clinical education. It is a scien...

A few people skip the wait

Most programs want a bachelor's degree first, but some run a three plus three format and a limited number admit students straight out of high school into a guaranteed place. If you are certain at 17, those pro...



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