

Recreation Therapist

You use activity as treatment: getting someone back to cooking, gardening or shooting hoops after their life changed.

TYPICAL PAY

\$61,960

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$41k to \$100k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Rehabilitation hospitals, veterans hospitals, behavioral health units,...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, psychology and health, plus any sport, music or art you actually enjoy. You will use those activities as tools.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Therapeutic recreation, or recreation with a therapeutic option, or another major if you complete the required coursework.
- 3 Required coursework** Inside the degree
At least 18 semester hours of therapeutic recreation content across 6 or more courses, plus 18 semester hours of supporting courses including anatomy and physiology, abnormal psychology and human growth and development.
- 4 Internship** One semester
A minimum 560 hour, 14 week internship for academic credit, supervised by a certified therapeutic recreation specialist at the site and at your college.
- 5 Certification exam** Months
Apply to the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification, allow 4 to 6 weeks for the eligibility review, then sit the national exam.

Pros and cons

- + A clinical health career on a four year degree, with no graduate school needed
- + One national certification that works in every state
- + Mostly daytime hours, unusual for hospital work
- Pays less than physical and occupational therapy for similar responsibility
- The required internship is 14 weeks and usually unpaid
- Few colleges offer the major, so you may have to move to study it

Good to know

The field grew out of military hospitals

Organized recreation as treatment took hold in American hospitals caring for wounded service members, and veterans facilities are still the largest single employer of recreation therapists in the country.

The internship is exactly specified

To qualify by the academic route you need a minimum of 560 hours across at least 14 weeks, for academic credit, supervised by a certified specialist both at the site and at your college. The number is not a gu...

Optional boosts

Physical rehabilitation. Behavioral health. Adaptive sports. Geriatrics and dementia care.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Recreational Therapists (29-1125.00)
National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification: path to certification
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
USAJOBS (the official federal hiring site)

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/recreation-therapist>



Scan for the full clicker