

Healthcare Practitioners and Technicians

Physical Therapists

Physical Therapists (PTs) diagnose and treat musculoskeletal problems and movement disorders in people of all ages. PTs provide care, which includes therapeutic exercise, manual therapy, functional training, physical agents and modalities (i.e. ultrasound, E-stim, heat/ice packs, and iontophoresis). They provide assistive and adaptive training and patient education to individuals who have musculoskeletal and functional problems. These issues can stem from back and neck pain and injuries, strains and sprains, fractures, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injuries, burns, amputations, and diabetes.

Physical therapists typically work in hospitals, outpatient clinics, schools, sub-acute facilities (nursing homes), and in patient's homes. Physical therapy is often very physically demanding. PTs often spend long periods of time on their feet, and have to kneel, crouch, and bend over to demonstrate exercises to patients. They may have to lift heavy equipment or help transfer patients. PTs who travel between patient's homes may spend many hours in a vehicle. Most physical therapists work 40 hours a week but this can vary depending on the setting. For example, many PTs who work in schools receive the summers off.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

Obtaining a Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) is currently required for new graduates to become licensed physical therapists.

Requirements for entry into a DPT program include a bachelor's degree from an accredited university, Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, and volunteer hours or working experience in a physical therapy setting. A bachelor's degree from any field of study may be used for admission into a DPT program but degrees in Exercise Science, Psychology, Chemistry, and the Biological Sciences are the most advantageous for being successful in physical therapy school.

Coursework covered in DPT programs include:

- Anatomy,
- Physiology,
- Pathology,

- Pharmacology,
- Neuroscience,
- Exercise physiology,
- Research,
- Learning how to read x-rays, MRIs, and CT scans,
- Clinical reasoning skills, and
- General clinical skills which include medical screening, interventions, examinations, and diagnostic measures.

A DPT program is three years in length and the total time to complete a DPT, including the undergraduate degree, is 7 years.

Requirements for licensure to practice as a physical therapist vary by state but typically include:

- Graduating from a CAPTE accredited program,
- A passing score on the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE), and
- Requirements set by the state the therapist wishes to practice in, such as a jurisprudence exam.

The exam must be taken within 6 months of graduation. Exam prices vary by state. During the time between graduation from school and taking the exam a therapist may practice on a limited permit. The fee for a limited permit in New York State is listed below. To maintain licensure many states require that a certain number of continuing education classes be taken by the therapist each year. Costs of continuing education vary.

More Information on Licensing:

- American Physical Therapy Association (APTA): www.apta.org
- Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE): <http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CAPTE3&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=65&ContentID=49490>
- New York State Office of Professions: <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/pt/>
- National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE): <https://www.fsbpt.org/ForCandidatesAndLicensees/NPTE/>

- American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties:
<http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=ABPTS1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=42&ContentID=14391>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) earned at an accredited public university costs an average of \$14,900* per year. Completion time is generally three years.

New York State Physical Therapist Licensure Fee: \$294

New York State Limited Permit Fee: \$70

National Physical Therapist Examination Fee (NPTE): \$370

* Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.