

Physical Therapist

■ Job Description

Physical therapists work with patients to restore function and prevent disability after disease or injury. The goal is to help people reach their maximum physical ability, so they may assume productive roles in society while learning to live within the limits of a disease or disability. Physical therapists evaluate patients and plan a treatment program involving exercise, heat, cold, water, and ultrasound. The therapist may give strengthening exercises to someone who has fractured a leg; lessons in walking and stair climbing to a patient with paralysis after a stroke; or coordination exercises to a child with cerebral palsy. Sometimes therapists teach patients how to walk with an artificial leg or straight-leg braces. When progress is slow, the therapist must keep up the patient's morale and cooperation. Thus, physical therapists need a good understanding of people and what motivates them. Physical therapists also work to prevent injury and disease by coordinating fitness programs.

■ Job Settings

Hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools for handicapped children, public schools, clinics, physician's offices, nursing homes, and summer camps. Physical therapists can also be self-employed; serve in the Armed Forces; or work in public health agencies, industry, or sports medicine clinics.

■ Projected Need

Physical therapist is one of the top 50 fastest growing occupations in the state. Employment is also expected to grow faster than average nationally through 2010.

Many factors will affect this growth. First, an aging population will increase the number of people with conditions that require therapy. Second, medical advances will make it possible to save the lives of babies with birth defects. Other medical advances will save the lives of trauma victims. Both the children and the trauma victims will need therapy. Third, people are becoming more interested in promoting health. As a result, employers often use physical therapists to evaluate work sites and plan

exercise programs. These services can save them money by preventing illness and injuries.

In Illinois, there were 5,170 people employed in this small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for physical therapists is \$27.20 per hour. Half of all physical therapists earn between \$23.13 and \$33.23 per hour.

Entry rates for physical therapists in Illinois are \$22.19 per hour. Experienced physical therapists earn \$32.83 per hour. Median wage is \$27.91 per hour. Wages in selected cities are given below:

City	Median Hourly Wage
Bloomington-Normal	\$25.74
Champaign-Urbana	\$27.68
Chicago	\$28.47
Decatur	\$26.42
Kankakee	\$25.69
Moline-Rock Island	\$25.81
Peoria-Pekin	\$23.88
Rockford	\$25.61
Springfield	\$27.34
St. Louis	\$25.13

■ Related Careers

Any of the other rehabilitative therapies or nursing might provide similar personal satisfactions.

■ Differences in Training

As of 2002, all accredited physical therapy programs are at the master's degree level and above. Competition for admission to physical therapy programs is very intense. Interested students should attain superior grades in high school and college, especially in science courses. Before granting admission, many professional education programs require experience as a volunteer in a physical therapy department of a hospital or clinic.

■ **Related Educational Programs**

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/> You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.

[Physical Therapy](#)

■ **Credentials**

Physical therapists must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation prior to employment within the state. To be licensed, the individual must satisfactorily complete an accredited program in physical therapy and pass the state exam.

■ **Resources**

American Physical Therapy Association
1111 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
Phone: 800.999.2782
<http://www.apta.org>
Select "Jobs/Career Center" then "Choosing Physical Therapy as a Career."

The association annually offers scholarships to minority students enrolled in accredited physical therapy programs.