



## get on the rehab therapy path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if physical therapist is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you good at teaching, explaining and motivating people?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Do you like to evaluate problems, and come up with the best solution?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Are you good at dealing with many different types of people?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Are you caring, compassionate and patient?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you want to assist others in reaching their goals?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Do you like physical, hands-on work?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Are you willing to invest about seven years in your education?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Physical therapists work to diagnose a problem, relieve pain, and increase strength and mobility in patients who are dealing with injury, illness, disabilities, birth defects or aging. Physical therapists also work in the area of prevention, helping patients avoid disease or disability, or stop existing conditions from worsening. Physical therapists use a wide variety of exercises and treatments to help their patients reach specific goals, whether that be to regain the use of their legs or set a new athletic record.

With additional education, physical therapists can specialize in areas such as geriatrics, hand rehabilitation, home health, orthopedics, pediatrics, research, sports medicine and women's health.

### What do physical therapists do?

Some common responsibilities of physical therapists include:

- Receive referrals from doctors or other health care professionals.
- Review patients' medical history.
- Evaluate patients' posture, balance, strength, muscle function and range of motion.
- Identify problems and make a diagnosis.
- Create individualized treatment programs for patients.
- Explain treatments to patients and answer related questions.
- Establish exercise programs to improve flexibility, strength and agility.

- Provide treatments, such as massage, traction, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, or hot and cold packs.
- Instruct patients and their families on treatments and exercises to be done at home.
- Evaluate patients' progress and modify treatment plans, when necessary.
- Consult with other medical providers about patients' progress.
- Maintain complete, accurate records on patients' treatment, goals and progress.
- Refer patients to other health care providers, when necessary.
- Lead group activities and perform community health screenings.
- Research medical and physical therapy methods.
- Provide education on injury prevention and treatment.
- Supervise physical therapist assistants and aides.
- Teach physical therapy students and other medical staff.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, physical therapists earn an average hourly wage of \$38.61.

## How do I become a physical therapist? How long does it take?

To become a physical therapist, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Earn a bachelor's degree.
- Graduate from an accredited program with a master's degree or higher in physical therapy.
- Pass the National Physical Therapy exam.
- Obtain a state license.

To be accepted into a physical therapy program, you must have a bachelor's degree, which takes about four years to complete. Some physical therapy programs offer a master's degree, however, most programs are starting to offer only doctoral degrees. These programs take about three years to complete.

Some people start out as physical therapy assistants, then go on to pursue additional education to become physical therapists. Physical therapy assistant programs typically take two years to complete.

While there are currently no physical therapy programs in Alaska, planning has begun to bring and host programs in the state. A pre-physical therapy program is also available in-state. Learn more by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

## Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a physical therapist? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college-preparatory and advanced placement (AP) classes. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Health education
- Introduction to health care
- Certified nursing assisting
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

## Are there jobs available?

There are currently about 11 job openings a year for physical therapists in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (24.6 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

## Where are the jobs?

In Alaska, physical therapists work for physical therapy clinics, hospitals, home health care services, nursing homes, doctors' offices, athletic departments, private practices and school districts. In rural areas, physical therapists often work in regional hospitals or travel to small communities to provide care.

## What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the rehab therapy career pathway? Be sure to read about occupational therapists – another rehab therapy "hot job" in Alaska!

