

Athletic Trainers

Significant Points

- A bachelor's degree is usually the minimum requirement, but many athletic trainers hold a master's or doctoral degree.
- Long hours, sometimes including nights and weekends, are common.
- Job prospects should be good in the healthcare industry and in high schools, but competition is expected for positions with professional and college sports teams.

Nature of the Work

Athletic trainers help prevent and treat injuries for people of all ages. Their patients and clients include everyone from professional athletes to industrial workers. Recognized by the American Medical Association as allied health professionals, athletic trainers specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation of muscle and bone injuries and illnesses. Athletic trainers, as one of the first healthcare providers on the scene when injuries occur, must be able to recognize, evaluate, and assess injuries and provide immediate care when needed. Athletic trainers should not be confused with fitness trainers or personal trainers, who are not healthcare workers, but rather train people to become physically fit. (Fitness workers are discussed elsewhere in the Handbook.)

Athletic trainers try to prevent injuries by educating people on how to reduce their risk for injuries and by advising them on the proper use of equipment, exercises to improve balance and strength, and home exercises and therapy programs. They also help apply protective or injury-preventive devices such as tape, bandages, and braces.

Athletic trainers may work under the direction of a licensed physician, and in cooperation with other healthcare providers. The extent of the direction ranges from discussing specific injuries and treatment options with a physician to performing evaluations and treatments as directed by a physician. Some athletic trainers meet with the team physician or consulting physician once or twice a week; others interact with a physician every day. Athletic trainers often have administrative responsibilities. These may include regular meetings with an athletic director, physician practice manager, or other administrative officer to deal with budgets, purchasing, policy implementation, and other business-related issues.

Work environment. The industry and individual employer are significant in determining the work environment of athletic trainers. Many athletic trainers work indoors most of the time; others, especially those in some sports-related jobs, spend much of their time working outdoors. The job also might require standing for long periods, working with medical equipment or machinery, and being able to walk, run, kneel, stoop, or crawl. Travel may be required.

Schedules vary by work setting. Athletic trainers in nonsports settings generally have an established schedule—usually about 40 to 50 hours per week—with nights and weekends off. Athletic

trainers working in hospitals and clinics may spend part of their time working at other locations doing outreach services. The most common outreach programs include conducting athletic training services and speaking at high schools, colleges, and commercial businesses.

Athletic trainers in sports settings have schedules that are longer and more variable. These athletic trainers must be present for team practices and competitions, which often are on evenings and weekends, and their schedules can change on short notice when games and practices have to be rescheduled. In high schools, athletic trainers who also teach may work 60 to 70 hours a week, or more. In National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I colleges and universities, athletic trainers generally work with one team; when that team's sport is in season, working at least 50 to 60 hours a week is common. Athletic trainers in smaller colleges and universities often work with several teams and have teaching responsibilities. During the off-season, a 40-hour to 50-hour work week may be normal in most settings. Athletic trainers for professional sports teams generally work the most hours per week. During training camps, practices, and competitions, they may be required to work up to 12 hours a day.

There is some stress involved with being an athletic trainer. The work of athletic trainers requires frequent interaction with others. They consult with physicians as well as have frequent contact with athletes and patients to discuss and administer treatments, rehabilitation programs, injury-preventive practices, and other health-related issues. Athletic trainers are responsible for their clients' health, and sometimes have to make quick decisions that could affect the health or career of their clients. Athletics trainers also can be affected by the pressure to win that is typical of competitive sports teams.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's degree is usually the minimum requirement, but many athletic trainers hold a master's or doctoral degree. In 2009, 47 States required athletic trainers to be licensed or hold some form of registration.

Education and training. A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university is required for almost all jobs as



Athletic trainers apply protective devices such as tape, bandages, and braces.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Athletic trainers.....	29-9091	16,300	22,400	6,000	37

(NOTE) Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

an athletic trainer. In 2009, there were about 350 accredited undergraduate programs nationwide. Students in these programs are educated both in the classroom and in clinical settings. Formal education includes many science and health-related courses, such as human anatomy, physiology, nutrition, and biomechanics.

According to the National Athletic Trainers' Association, almost 70 percent of athletic trainers have a master's degree or higher. Athletic trainers may need a master's or higher degree to be eligible for some positions, especially those in colleges and universities, and to increase their advancement opportunities. Because some positions in high schools involve teaching along with athletic trainer responsibilities, a teaching certificate or license could be required.

Licensure and certification. In 2009, 47 States required athletic trainers to be licensed or registered; this requires certification from the Board of Certification, Inc. (BOC). For BOC certification, athletic trainers need a bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited athletic training program and must pass a rigorous examination. To retain certification, credential holders must continue taking medical-related courses and adhere to the BOC standards of practice. In Alaska, California, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia where licensure is not required, certification is voluntary but may be helpful for those seeking jobs and advancement.

Other qualifications. Because all athletic trainers deal directly with a variety of people, they need good social and communication skills. They should be able to manage difficult situations and the stress associated with them, such as when disagreements arise with coaches, patients, clients, or parents regarding suggested treatment. Athletic trainers also should be organized, be able to manage time wisely, be inquisitive, and have a strong desire to help people.

Advancement. There are a few ways for athletic trainers to advance. Some athletic trainers advance by switching teams or sports to gain additional responsibility or pay. Assistant athletic trainers may become head athletic trainers and, eventually, athletic directors or physician, hospital or clinic practice administrators where they assume a management role. Some athletic trainers move into sales and marketing positions, using their expertise to sell medical and athletic equipment.

Employment

Athletic trainers held about 16,300 jobs in 2008 and are found in every part of the country. Most athletic trainer jobs are related to sports, although an increasing number also work in nonsports settings. About 39 percent were found in public and private educational services, primarily in colleges, universities, and high schools. Another 38 percent of athletic trainers worked in healthcare, including jobs in hospitals, offices of physicians, and offices of other health practitioners. About 13 percent

worked in fitness and recreational sports centers. Around 5 percent work in spectator sports.

Job Outlook

Employment is projected to grow much faster than average. Job prospects should be good in the healthcare industry and in high schools, but competition is expected for positions with professional and college sports teams.

Employment change. Employment of athletic trainers is projected to grow 37 percent from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations, because of their role in preventing injuries and reducing healthcare costs. Job growth will be concentrated in the healthcare industry, including hospitals and offices of health practitioners. Fitness and recreation sports centers also will provide new jobs, as these establishments grow and continue to need additional athletic trainers to provide support for their clients. Growth in positions with sports teams will be somewhat slower, however, as most professional sports clubs and colleges and universities already have complete athletic training staffs.

The demand for healthcare, with an emphasis on preventive care, should grow as the population ages and as a way to reduce healthcare costs. Increased licensure requirements and regulation has led to a greater acceptance of athletic trainers as qualified healthcare providers. As a result, third-party reimbursement is expected to continue to grow for athletic training services. Athletic trainers will benefit from this expansion because they provide a cost-effective way to increase the number of health professionals in an office or other setting.

In some States, there are efforts underway to have an athletic trainer in every high school to work with student-athletes, which may lead to growth in the number of athletic trainers employed in high schools. In addition, as more young athletes specialize in certain sports, there is increasing demand for athletic trainers to deal with repetitive stress injuries.

As athletic trainers continue to expand their services, more employers are expected to use these workers to reduce healthcare costs by preventing work-related injuries. Athletic trainers can help prevent injuries and provide immediate treatment for many injuries that do occur. For example, some athletic trainers may be hired to increase the fitness and performance of police and firefighters.

Job prospects. Job prospects should be good for athletic trainers in the healthcare industry and in high schools. Those looking for a position with a professional or college sports team may face competition.

Because of relatively low turnover, the settings with the best job prospects will be the ones that are expected to have the most job growth, primarily positions in the healthcare and fitness and recreational sports centers industries. Additional job opportunities may arise in elementary and secondary schools as more

positions are created. Some of these positions also will require teaching responsibilities.

There are relatively few positions for professional and collegiate sports teams in comparison to the number of applicants. Turnover among professional sports team athletic trainers is also limited. Many athletic trainers prefer to continue to work with the same coaches, administrators, and players when a good working relationship already exists.

There also are opportunities for athletic trainers to join the military, although they would not be classified as an athletic trainer. Enlisted soldiers and officers who are athletic trainers are usually placed in another program, such as health educator or training specialist, in which their skills are useful. (For information on military careers, see the *Handbook* statement on job opportunities in the Armed Forces.)

This occupation is expected to continue to change over the next decade, including more administrative responsibilities, adapting to new technology, and working with larger populations, and jobseekers must be prepared to adapt to these changes.

Earnings

Most athletic trainers work in full-time positions, and typically receive benefits. The salary of an athletic trainer depends on experience and job responsibilities, and varies by job setting. Median annual wages for athletic trainers were \$39,640 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between \$32,070 and \$49,250. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$23,450, while the top 10 percent earned more than \$60,960.

Many employers pay for some of the continuing education required for athletic trainers to remain certified, although the amount covered varies from employer to employer.

Related Occupations

Other American Medical Association allied health professionals include:

- Chiropractors
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics
- Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses
- Massage therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Physical therapists
- Physician assistants
- Physicians and surgeons
- Podiatrists
- Recreational therapists
- Registered nurses
- Respiratory therapists

Sources of Additional Information

For further information on careers in athletic training, contact:

➤ National Athletic Trainers' Association, 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Suite 200, Dallas, TX 75247. Internet: <http://www.nata.org>

For further information on certification, contact:

➤ Board of Certification, Inc., 1415 Harney St., Suite 200, Omaha, NE 68102. Internet: <http://www.bocatac.org>

The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos294.htm>