

# Physical Therapist vs. Physical Therapist Assistant



Physical therapists (PTs) and physical therapist assistants (PTAs) perform many of the same basic responsibilities such as assisting patients in stretches and exercises, but some key characteristics set them apart.

PTs are mainly concerned with diagnosing patients and developing a rehabilitation program that is tailored to the patient's prognosis. PTAs on the other hand have more focus on preparing patients to be diagnosed and assisting in executing the rehabilitation plan.

Here's a breakdown of those and other key differences in these lucrative and rapidly expanding careers in physical therapy:

Physical Therapist	Physical Therapist Assistant
<b>Job Duties</b>	
Diagnose and provide care to individuals suffering from injuries, set up a rehabilitation plan for patients, teach exercises, stretches, and hands-on therapy to help increase the patient's ability to move.	Determine the severity of the patient's injuries and report it to a physical therapist, educate patients on what to do after treatments, assist patients in exercises and stretches, instruct patients on how to use devices and equipment.
<b>Education</b>	
Postgraduate professional degrees are required. Many receive a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), which typically requires 3 years of schooling after a bachelor's	Most states require an associate's degree from an accredited physical therapy program.

degree. DPT degrees usually require prerequisites such as anatomy, biology, physiology, and chemistry

Programs usually involve academic coursework along with clinical experience

### Licensing / certification

Every state requires a physical therapist license. To earn a license, the National Physical Therapy Examination or a state-administered exam must be passed. Many states also require continuing education in order to maintain licensure. Some physical therapists choose to become certified in a particular clinical specialty and do so by passing an exam.

To obtain a physical therapist assistant license most states require that you graduate from an accredited physical therapy assistant program and have passed the Physical National Physical Therapy Exam. Some states additionally require a state-administered exam.

### Pay

Median annual salary: **\$85,400**

Median annual salary: **\$45,290**

### Expected job growth

**25 percent increase** through 2026

**30 percent increase** through 2026

### Next step?

After gaining experience in the field, physical therapists have the option of specializing and becoming certified in an area of interest.

Many continue formal education to move into management, education, or administration positions.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018-19 Occupational Outlook Handbook; [Physical Therapy Assistants](#), [Physical Therapists](#).

The salary information listed is based on a national average, unless noted. Actual salaries may vary greatly based on specialization within the field, location, years of experience and other factors. National long-term projections of employment growth may not reflect local and/or short-term economic or job conditions, and do not guarantee actual job growth.