Physical Therapy (DPT)

Career Description

- Physical Therapists help patients restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent physical disabilities. They also:
  - Work closely with patients to restore, maintain, and promote fitness and health.
  - Assist patients who have been in accidents and those with disabling conditions such as stroke, arthritis, and head injuries.
  - Measure strength, range of motion, balance, coordination, muscle performance, and motor function.
  - Help determine if the person can function independently.
  - Develop a treatment plan that will help the patient improve function, prevent further injury, and reach their personal goals.
- PTs work in a variety of settings including schools, hospitals, extended care facilities, clinics, and private offices. Some also treat people in their homes.
- PTs often consult with physicians, dentists, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and audiologists to coordinate patient care.
- Some PTs treat a wide range of ailments while others specialize in areas such as pediatrics, geriatrics, sports medicine, neurology, and cardipulmonary physical therapy.
- Employers also seek PTs to evaluate worksites, develop exercise programs, and teach safe work habits.
- Physical therapy can be a physically demanding job that requires stooping, kneeling, lifting, and standing for long periods.

Becoming a Physical Therapist

- A bachelor’s degree, clinical background, prerequisite courses, and often an aptitude test (the Graduate Record Exam) are required.
- Physical therapy education programs in the U.S. offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree.
- All physical therapists must pass a licensure exam before they can practice.

Preparation

- Shadow a physical therapist to make sure this is the right field and you truly understand what a PT does.
- Many schools will require at least 40 hours of observing a professional in the field and that this time be spent in multiple of settings (for example, in-patient and out-patient settings).
- Although PT programs do not have a standard set of requirements, many similarities in their requirements do exist, see listing below.
- Generally a grade of C or higher is required for all prerequisite courses.
- Initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as MD and OT programs.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each PT program but similar to this list)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400 or BIOL 30100-30200*; some schools also require General Biology (BIOL 11000-11100 or 13100 &amp; BIOL 23100 &amp; 23200 (lab))</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Chemistry</td>
<td>CHM 11500-11600 (CHM 11100-11200 cannot replace CHM 11500 for Indiana schools), or CHM 12901 &amp; CHM 115 credit exam (not accepted at all programs) or CHM 12500-12600 or CHM 13600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>PHYS 22000-22100 or PHYS 23300-23400 or PHYS 17200-27200 or PHYS 17200 &amp; 24100 &amp; 25200 (lab) or ENGR 16100-16200*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or PSY 20100* or SOC 38200*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psych/Life Span</td>
<td>PSY 12000 &amp; HDFS 21000 or PSY 12000 &amp; PSY 23500 &amp; PSY 36700</td>
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<td>Other required &amp;/or recommended courses</td>
<td>English Composition, Exercise Science, College Algebra, Medical Terminology, and/or Social Science &amp; Humanities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Med Planning Seminar (optional)</td>
<td>BIOL 39600-0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to medical school and other health professions programs</td>
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*Ask individual PT programs if they will accept these courses toward their requirements.
Student Organization: Pre-OT/PT Club

Researching Programs

- PT program prerequisites (including courses, observation hours, and GRE) http://www.ptcas.org/ProgramPrereqs/

Applying

- Take an aptitude test. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is typically required.
- If English is not your first language, a TOEFL score may be required.
- Application to most schools is through an online system called PTCAS.
- Competitive applications will have:
  - Strong academic performance including a grade point average of 3.4-3.8
  - Scores above national average on the GRE
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - Undergraduate research experience is a plus
  - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experiences
  - Strong positive letters of recommendation (mostly from faculty and physical therapists)
- Early application is essential. PTCAS generally opens in late June/early July. Submission by mid-August is ideal.

Employment Outlook

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects a 28% increase in demand through 2026.
- To contain costs, PTs are increasingly supervising physical therapy assistants and aides.
- In 2018, the median annual earnings of Physical Therapists was $87,930 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Fee Assistance

- PTCAS Fee Assistance Program http://www.ptcas.org/Fees/
- GRE Fee Reduction Program https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/

Programs in Indiana

- University of Indianapolis Indianapolis, IN http://uindy.edu/health-sciences/pt?_ga=1.10411061.1236973250.1476290363
- IUPUI Indianapolis, IN https://shrs.iupui.edu/admissions/apply/doctorate-physical-therapy/index.html
- University of Evansville Evansville, IN https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicaltherapy/
- Trine University Angola, IN https://trine.edu/academics/majors-degrees/graduate/doctor-physical-therapy/index.aspx
- Indiana State University Terre Haute, IN https://www.indstate.edu/health/program/dpt

More Information

- American Physical Therapy Association https://www.apta.org/
- PTCAS (application system) http://www.ptcas.org

Other Careers to Consider

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy Assistant
- Orthotics & Prosthetics
- Podiatry