

## Pursuing a Career as a Physical Therapist (PT)

### Profession Overview

Physical Therapists (PTs), help people who have injuries or illnesses improve their movement and manage their pain. They are often an important part of rehabilitation and treatment of patients with chronic conditions or injuries.

Typical Duties:

- ▶ Diagnose patients' dysfunctional movements by watching them stand/walk and listening to their concerns
- ▶ Collaborate with physicians to set up a plan for patients, outlining the patient's goals and treatments
- ▶ Use exercises, stretching maneuvers, hands-on therapy, and equipment to ease pain and increase mobility
- ▶ Evaluate a patient's progress, modifying a treatment plan and trying new treatments as needed
- ▶ Educate patients and their families about what to expect during recovery

Physical Therapists provide care to people of all ages who have functional problems resulting from back and neck injuries, sprains, strains, fractures, arthritis, amputations, stroke, birth conditions such as cerebral palsy, injuries related to work and sports, and other conditions. PTs are trained to use a variety of techniques—sometimes called modalities—to care for their patients. These techniques include applying heat and cold, hands-on stimulation or massage, and using assistive and adaptive devices and equipment. Check out more information about this career [on the Explore Health Careers webpage](#).

### Education Programs

Physical Therapists are required to have a professional degree. PT programs award a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree. View [a complete list of DPT programs on the American Physical Therapy Association's website](#).

Doctoral programs typically last 3 years. The majority (80%) of the DPT curriculum comprises classroom (didactic) and lab study and the remaining (20%) is dedicated to clinical education.

### Admission Requirements: Knowledge and Strategies

Work with your faculty advisor and/or a member of [Kenyon's Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#) to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's individual website for specific requirements. APTA provides [a comparison of course prerequisites by program](#) that is a useful starting point. Common course requirements include: General chemistry, human anatomy, human physiology, general biology, physics, statistics, general psychology and lifespan psychology. Some programs will require additional courses in psychology or behavioral science, or courses such as medical terminology, a higher mathematics course and exercise physiology. Individual schools determine how many prerequisites must be completed prior to applying. Many will allow 1-2 uncompleted classes at the time of application. PT prerequisites vary widely: planning for specific programs is key!

Communicating directly with PT programs of interest about what courses they will accept to complete their requirements is strongly encouraged.

Most PT schools require or recommend a minimum number of observation hours within the field, ranging from 40 hours to over 300 hours. Gaining these experiences will mean tracking hours in an organized manner. Consult the [APTA's information about observation hour requirements by program](#) to see minimum expectations and information on documentation. Some programs will specify that a licensed Physical Therapist must verify hours with a signed form uploaded via PTCAS. Programs often like to see these hours occurring in a variety of practice settings, such as in-patient versus outpatient facilities, to ensure a wide breadth of exposure to the field.

When you submit an application, remember you will do so through a centralized application site: [Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service \(PTCAS\)](#). PTCAS typically opens in mid-June of each year. Supplemental applications and fees are also required by many PT programs. Application requirements and deadlines vary widely by PT program. Many PT programs have multiple deadline dates (i.e., preferred, priority, or early decision) or operate on a rolling admissions process. Consult the [APTA deadlines by program chart](#) to get a sense of timing.

## Standardized Test

Depending on your programs of interest, you will be preparing and taking the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Learn more about the GRE on [ETS's website](#). Programs may set minimum scores and last acceptable test dates, but not every program will require the GRE. Check your schools individually using [APTA's chart of GRE requirements by program](#).

## General Advising Information

- Strive for academic success: Most PT programs have a minimum GPA requirement, with 3.0 cumulative being a very common minimum. However, programs also share their average for incoming students, which tends to be around a 3.4-3.6 for most programs. Utilize [APTA's GPA comparison chart](#) to understand competitiveness.
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and professionals. Such connections can open opportunities and letters of recommendation will be required to apply. Typically, three letters of recommendation are necessary. Ideally, one should be from a professor and at least one from a Physical Therapist. Individual PT programs will have requirements on how many letters are required and who must write them. [Check out APTA's chart on letter writers for program specific details](#).
- Plan financially: there is a cost associated with standardized tests and applying to schools. Costs of attending individual programs also vary widely. Find out more through [APTA's Financial Solutions Center](#).

## Want more information?

Make an appointment with Sara Stasko in the CDO via [Handshake](#) or email [stasko1@kenyon.edu](mailto:stasko1@kenyon.edu). Connect with a faculty advisor on the [Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#).