WHAT DOES A PHYSICAL THERAPIST (PT) DO?

- Diagnose patients’ dysfunctional movements by watching them stand or walk and by listening to their concerns
- Set up a plan for their patients, outlining the patient's goals and the planned treatments
- Use exercises, stretching maneuvers, hands-on therapy, and equipment to ease patients’ pain and increase their 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 from injury and illness and how best to cope with what happens

From the online Occupational Handbook, 2012

WHAT DEGREE DO I NEED TO BE A PHYSICAL THERAPIST?

You must earn a master’s or doctoral degree from a college that meets accreditation standards set by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).

WHAT CLASSES DO I NEED TO TAKE TO GET INTO PHYSICAL THERAPY SCHOOL?*

Prerequisites for admission vary significantly across PT programs. Visit the school website or the PTCAS directory to determine what courses are required by each institution. The most commonly required course prerequisites are below:

- Anatomy and Physiology I / Anatomy *
- Anatomy and Physiology II / Physiology *
- Biology I and II
- Advanced Biology (eg, cell, embryology, genetics, histology, immunology, microbiology, molecular)
- Chemistry I and II
- Physics I and II
- Psychology
- Advanced Psychology (eg, abnormal, developmental, rehabilitation, sports)
- Statistics
- English Composition

* Some PT programs only accept anatomy and/or physiology courses completed in a biology, neuroscience, anatomy, or integrated physiology department. PT programs may not accept a combined anatomy and physiology (A&P) course or those completed in other departments, such as kinesiology. Visit the PTCAS directory to determine what type of anatomy and physiology courses are required for admission.

WHAT TEST DO I NEED TO TAKE FOR ADMISSION?

You must take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) at least 6 weeks before the application deadline.

WHAT DOES A COMPETITIVE APPLICANT LOOK LIKE?

In 2011-12, the average overall undergraduate GPA for accepted PTCAS applicants was 3.52. While PTCAS does not report the average GRE score, many programs have an average score of 155 on both the verbal and quantitative reasoning sections of the exam and a 4.0 on the writing section. In addition, many programs require applicants to have a certain number of volunteer or paid PT experiences working with patients under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. The program may specify the settings and types of experiences required. Applicants may also be required to have a licensed physical therapist verify the hours. This experience may be an important factor in the admissions process.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Apply through PT Centralized Application Service (PTCAS), an online application process. Not all professional PT programs participate in PTCAS. Applicants who wish to apply to a NON-participating PTCAS program must apply directly to the institution using that PT program’s local application. For a list of non-PTCAS institutions, click here.

WHEN DO I APPLY?

DON’T PROCRASTINATE! PTCAS typically opens late June/early July. Application deadlines vary, and it is your responsibility to know the deadlines for each of the schools to which you apply. Some schools have a rolling admissions process, so apply well in advance in order to have the best chance of admission.

WHAT SITES DO I NEED TO CHECK OUT?

American Physical Therapy Association: www.apta.org
Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service: www.ptcas.org