



## PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

### Physical Therapists in California

Physical therapists help restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients with injuries or disease. They treat patients – including accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions – for back conditions, arthritis, head injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome, and hip fractures, as well as rehabilitation after surgery, a serious injury or a stroke.

Physical therapists develop treatment plans describing a treatment strategy, its purpose, and its anticipated outcome. Treatment often includes exercises for patients who have been immobilized to increase their flexibility and range of motion. Then, treatment advances to exercises to improve strength, balance, coordination, and balance. The goal is to improve how an individual functions at work and at home.

*U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook ([www.bls.gov/oco/ocos080.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos080.htm))*

### Education

California physical therapists have graduated from an accredited physical therapist educational program that offers degrees at the master's degree level and above.

### Credentialing: Licensing and Certification

To practice physical therapy in California, one must be licensed by the [Physical Therapy Board of California](#) (Board). The initials "P.T." after a practitioner's name indicate that he or she is a licensed physical therapist and has met the Board's education and examination requirements.

To ensure a physical therapist is licensed and in good standing, you can check the [Board's License Verification](#) or contact the Board. Although not required, many physical therapists may also seek specialty certification, offered by the [American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties](#) (ABPTS) in seven specialty areas of physical therapy: pediatrics, geriatrics, orthopedics, sports, neurology, cardiopulmonary, and clinical electrophysiology.

### Referrals and Reimbursement

California requires an initial *diagnosis* (e.g. *patient's medical record*) for a medical condition by a physician or

other licensed diagnostician (e.g. nurse practitioner) before physical therapy can begin. You do not need a physician's diagnosis before physical therapy begins if you are seeking *individual health, fitness, and wellness* (e.g. promote physical fitness).

Also, it is in your best interests to contact your health plan to find out what physical therapy services are covered. Most health plans cover physical therapy services, but the requirements and scope of coverage will vary.

**To ensure a physical therapist is: 1) licensed and in good standing, or 2) to file a complaint, contact:**

**Physical Therapy Board of California**  
**1418 Howe Avenue, Suite 16, Sacramento, CA 95825-3204**  
**Phone: (916) 561.8200**  
**Complaint Line: (800) 832.2251**  
**Website: [www.ptb.ca.gov](http://www.ptb.ca.gov)**

### How Can I Find One?

Physicians and other health care professionals will often provide a recommendation or referral, although you are free to choose your own within your health plan guidelines. Check with the Board to ensure a physical therapist is licensed and in good standing.

### Additional Online Resources \*

<b>American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)</b> <a href="http://www.apta.org">www.apta.org</a>	<a href="#">Find a PT</a>
<b>American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS)</b> <a href="http://www.apta.org/education/specialist">www.apta.org/education/specialist</a>	<a href="#">Online Directory of Certified Clinical Specialists in Physical Therapy (1985-2004)</a>
<b>California Physical Therapy Association (CPTA)</b> <a href="http://www.ccapta.org">www.ccapta.org</a>	<a href="#">Find a PT</a>

\* **NOTE:** Association databases of members may not include all licensed practitioners.

You might also be interested in reading our "[Consumer's Guide to Occupational Therapists in California](#)."