

Know Your Therapist—A Who's Who Guide

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TYPES OF MEDICAL THERAPISTS

Physical Therapist (PT)—A State-licensed clinician who specializes in human movement. A PT has extensive training in analyzing movement to diagnose and treat impairments that may result in pain, dysfunction, and/or disability. Physical therapists help people to set goals and implement interventions to optimize their performance, maximize their functional mobility, and promote their independence. You do NOT require a physician referral to be evaluated and treated by a PT, but most insurance companies do require physician authorization for reimbursement. Most PTs are general practitioners but there also many PTs who have a board certification or sub-specialty one or more of the following areas: Orthopedics, Geriatrics, Neurology (NCS), Sports, Pediatrics, Women's Health, Cardiovascular & Pulmonary, Clinical Electrophysiology, Oncology, Wound Care, & Vestibular rehab. Typical entry-level training for a PT is to obtain a Bachelor's degree and then complete 2.5 years of graduate-level academics and 9 months of clinical internships to obtain a Doctorate.

Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA)—A State-licensed clinician who works under the supervision of a PT to implement the physical therapist's plan of care. PTAs are experienced in teaching, observing, and progressing the plan of care developed by the PT. Typical entry-level training for a PTA is 2.5 years of academics and 3 months of clinical internships to obtain an Associate's degree.

Occupational Therapist (OT)—A State-licensed clinician who specializes in optimizing a person's ability to successfully and independently perform activities of daily living (ADLs) such as dressing, bathing, grooming, toileting, hygiene, and eating. OTs also help train people to perform more advanced activities such as completing chores, meal preparation, organizational skills, and school/work task completion. Most OTs are general practitioners, but there are also many OTs who have subspecialties in Gerontology, Pediatrics, School individual education planning, Mental Health, Assistive technologies, Driving/Community mobility, Hand therapy, & Vision rehab. Typical entry-level training for an OT is to obtain a Bachelor's degree and then complete 2 years of graduate-level academics and 6 months of clinical internships to obtain a Master's degree.

Occupational Therapist Assistant (OTA)—A State-licensed clinician who works under the supervision of an OT to implement the occupational therapist's plan of care. Sometimes abbreviated as COTA, for Certified OTA, these clinicians are experienced in teaching, observing, and progressing the plan of care developed by the OT. Typical entry-level training for a COTA is 2 years of academics and 2 months of clinical internships to obtain an Associate's degree.

Speech Therapist (ST)—Also known as a **Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)**, is a State-licensed clinician who specializes in evaluating and treating disorders that result in difficulty speaking and/or difficulty swallowing (dysphagia). SLPs also assess cognition and help people to improve attention, memory, and problem-solving skills. STs create plans of care that include giving people exercises and activities to improve the quality of spoken language, facilitate the ability to communicate when speech, hearing, or auditory processing is impaired, and to optimize the ability to swallow foods and liquids without choking. Some STs have special training in the use of endoscopy and video fluoroscopy to assess vocal cord function and swallowing disorders. Typical entry-level training for an SLP is to obtain a Bachelor's degree and then complete a 2-year Master's degree program, followed by a 1 year clinical fellowship.

Speech Therapy Assistant (STA or SLPA)—is a State-licensed clinician who works under the supervision of an ST/SLP to implement the speech therapist's plan of care. These clinicians are experienced at teaching, observing, and progressing the plan of care developed by the speech language pathologist. Typical entry-level training for an SLPA is 2 years of academics with a concurrent clinical internship during the 2nd year to obtain an Associate's degree OR completion of a Bachelor's degree in SLP.

Certified Personal Trainer (CPT)—is NOT a licensed clinician. These are fitness professionals who have completed a basic self-study certification in exercise science. In general, these professionals can create a fitness program, progress an exercise program, and assess a person to ensure they are completing exercises with proper technique and intensity. They can help implement an exercise program prescribed by a PT. However, they cannot assess and treat injuries, nor do they treat movement dysfunction.

WHAT CAN THERAPISTS DO FOR YOU?

PTs, PTAs, OTs, OTAs (lots of overlap):

Patient education, Caregiver training, Safe patient handling training, Exercise prescription, Assistive Device prescription, Adaptive Equipment prescription, Durable Medical Equipment (DME) prescription, Environmental Modification consultation, Functional Mobility training (bed mobility, transfers, transitioning movements), Strength training, Endurance training, Seating/Wheelchair assessment, Flexibility/Range of motion training, Joint mobilization, Tone management, Splinting/Bracing, Positioning, Edema management, Pain management, Balance training, Work hardening, Ergonomics assessment, Cognitive screening & training, etc.

PTs/PTAs:

Gait & Balance Training, Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation, Vestibular rehabilitation, Wound care

OTs/OTAs:

ADL re-training (dressing, hygiene, toileting, etc.), Vision rehabilitation, Driver re-training, Hand therapy

STs/SLPAs:

Speech assessment & training, Swallowing assessment & training, and Cognitive assessment & training

CPT*: *(not medical clinician)*

Fitness program creation and implementation