



Children in Physical Therapy

Physical therapists work with children and their families to help each child achieve and maintain mobility and quality of life by maximizing his or her potential to function independently.

As primary care providers, physical therapists work with each family to promote active participation at home, school, and in the community. This includes implementing a wide variety of supports from infancy through adolescence in collaboration with families and other medical, educational, developmental, and rehabilitation specialists.

These services are often part of the plan of care provided by physical therapists who work with children:

- Developmental activities
- Strengthening
- Motor learning
- Movement and mobility
- Tone management
- Balance and coordination
- Burn and wound care
- Recreation, play, and leisure
- Orthotics and prosthetics
- Adaptation of daily care activities & routines
- Safety, health promotion, & prevention programs
- Equipment design, fabrication & fitting
- Use of assistive technology
- Posture, positioning, and lifting
- Cardiopulmonary endurance

What Role Does the Family Play?

The family plays the primary role in the child's development. The pediatric physical therapist works with the family to promote development and implement an individualized intervention program for the child. The family often is involved in assisting and enhancing the development of the child by:

- Positioning during daily routines and activities
- Adapting toys for play
- Expanding mobility options
- Using equipment effectively
- Implementing safety in the home and community
- Being a resource for the child's physical and health care needs
- Helping to ensure smooth transitions from early childhood to school and into adult life

Receiving Pediatric Physical Therapy

Your child's physical therapist will first work with the family to identify the child's needs and the family's concerns. The physical therapist will also conduct an examination and evaluation of the child in the context of his or her daily routines and activities. This evaluation may include, but not be limited to, mobility, sensory and neuromotor development, use of assistive technology, muscle and joint function, strength and endurance, cardiopulmonary status, posture and balance, and oral motor skills. After gathering all necessary information, the pediatric physical therapist will use their clinical expertise and evidence in collaboration with the child's family, caregivers, and other involved healthcare providers to design an appropriate plan of care.

Pediatric physical therapists work in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, private practices, and schools. The process of providing pediatric physical therapy can include collaboration, consultation, and interventions in natural learning environments, including the home, child care centers, preschools, schools, job sites, recreational centers, and other community settings. Pediatric physical therapists must hold a state license, and many have additional credentials including board certification as a Pediatric Clinical Specialist (PCS).



What You Need to Know About Access to Physical Therapy Services

Private and public health insurance programs cover payment for physical therapy, but the services and reimbursement vary. Families should be familiar with the benefits provided by their policy or program.

The provision of pediatric physical therapy is required by:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which includes provisions for pediatric physical therapy for children from birth to 21 years of age who are eligible for early intervention (Part C) or special education and related services. (Part B)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires the provision of reasonable accommodations, including physical therapy, for persons with disabilities.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects the rights of all individuals with disabilities.



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