

FACT SHEET

The ABCs of Pediatric Physical Therapy

WHAT IS PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPY?

Pediatric physical therapists (PTs) work with children and their families to assist each child in reaching their maximum potential to function independently and to promote active participation in home, school, and community environments. Physical therapists have expertise in movement, motor development, and body function (e.g., strength and endurance). They apply clinical reasoning during examination, evaluation, diagnosis, and intervention for children, youth, and young adults. As primary health care providers, PTs also promote health and wellness as they implement a wide variety of supports in collaboration with families, communities, and other medical, educational, developmental, and rehabilitation specialists.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE FAMILY PLAY?

Parents and families have the primary role in their child's development. The pediatric PT collaborates with the family to promote development and implement an individualized intervention program. Families are supported through coordination of services, advocacy, and assistance to enhance the development of their child. This can include:

- Positioning during daily routines and activities
- Adapting toys for play
- Expanding mobility options
- Using equipment effectively
- Facilitating safety for the home and community
- Accessing community programs and resources
- Providing information on the child's physical and health care needs
- Supporting family caregiving
- Smoothing transitions from early childhood to school and into adult life

The process of supporting children and families begins with an interview, or conversation, to identify the child's needs and family's concerns and continues with an examination and evaluation of the child in the context of their daily routines and activities. This examination 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. The process of providing pediatric physical therapy continues with collaboration, consultation, and intervention. Physical therapist assistants may be involved with the delivery of physical therapy services under the direction and supervision of a licensed PT.

WHERE DOES YOUR CHILD RECEIVE PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPY?

Pediatric physical therapy may be provided in natural learning environments, including home, child care centers, preschools, schools, job sites, recreational centers, and other community settings. Children and families also may have contact with pediatric PTs in hospitals and clinics when receiving physical therapy for medically-related conditions, specialty health care services, or during episodes of acute care.

IS YOUR CHILD ENTITLED TO PHYSICAL THERAPY SERVICES?

Private and public health insurance programs cover payment for physical therapy, but the services and reimbursement may vary and families should be familiar with the benefits provided by the policy or program. In addition, provision of pediatric physical therapy is required legislatively by:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education 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 individuals with disabilities who are protected from discrimination.

HOW DO PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPISTS USE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THEIR DECISIONS?

The Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy supports the use of evidence-informed practice, which is the integration of research findings, clinical expertise, and family priorities and preferences. Pediatric physical therapists may use evidence-informed practice to provide any of the following services as part of their goal-directed plan of care:

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

HOW ARE PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPISTS LICENSED?

Pediatric PTs have a special interest and desire to work with children and families and lend their unique talents and professional knowledge to children with many different conditions and strengths. Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants must be graduates of accredited educational programs and comply with rules of state licensure and practice guidelines. Additional credentials related to specialization in content, skills, or other academic degrees may be used to recognize an individual's advanced knowledge and skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have additional questions or would like to join the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy, please contact the Executive Office of the American Physical Therapy Association Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy at: APTA Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy, 1020 N Fairfax St, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314-1488, peditrics@apta.org, www.pediatricapta.org.

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