



The ABCs of Pediatric Physical Therapy

What Is Pediatric Physical Therapy?

Pediatric physical therapists work to help children reach their maximum potential for functional independence through examination, evaluation, promotion of health and wellness, and implementation of a wide variety of interventions and supports. Pediatric PTs support children from infancy through adolescence and collaborate with their families and other medical, educational, developmental, and rehabilitation specialists. They promote the participation of children in daily activities and routines in the home, school, and community.

Pediatric physical therapy promotes independence, increases participation, facilitates motor development and function, improves strength, enhances learning opportunities, and eases care giving.

What Role Does the Family Play?

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

- Positioning during daily routines and activities,
- Adapting toys for play,
- Expanding mobility options,
- Using equipment effectively,
- Teaching safety for the home and community,
- Providing information on the child's physical and health care needs, and
- Easing transitions from early childhood to school and into adult life.

How Can You Start Your Child in a Pediatric Physical Therapy Program?

The process of supporting children and families begins with an interview to identify the child's needs and continues with an examination and evaluation of the child in the context of their daily routines and activities. This evaluation may include, but not be limited to, muscle and joint function, mobility, strength and endurance, cardiopulmonary status, posture and balance, oral motor skills and feeding, sensory and neuromotor development, and use of assistive technology.

The process of providing pediatric physical therapy continues with collaboration, coaching, and interventions in natural learning environments, including home, child care centers, preschools, schools, job sites, and other community settings. Children and families also may have contact with pediatric physical therapists in hospitals and clinics when receiving care for related medical conditions or during episodes of acute care.

Is Your Child Entitled to Services?

Provision of pediatric physical therapy is required legislatively by:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 105-17, IDEA), which includes provisions for pediatric physical therapy for children from birth to 21 years of age who are eligible for early intervention or special education and related services;
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires the provision of reasonable accommodations, including physical therapy, for persons with disabilities; and
- The Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects the rights of all individuals with disabilities.

Do Pediatric Physical Therapists Use Evidence-based Practice?

The Section on Pediatrics supports use of evidence-based practice, which is the integration of research findings, clinical expertise, and values by pediatric physical therapists in order to collaborate with families, health care providers, and educators to provide best practice. Pediatric physical therapists may use evidence-based practice to provide any of the following services to a child:

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

How Are Pediatric Physical Therapists Licensed?

Each state has laws governing the licensure and practice of physical therapy. Physical therapists are graduates of accredited university graduate degree programs who hold licensure in the state in which they are practicing. Pediatric physical therapists have specialty training and the desire to work with children and families, and lend their unique talents and professional knowledge to children with many different conditions and strengths.

For More Information

If you have additional questions, would like to order additional copies of this brochure, or would like to join the Section on Pediatrics, please contact the Executive Office of the Section on Pediatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association at:

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