

# Physical Therapist vs. Physical Therapist Assistant...What's the Difference?

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A Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) is a healthcare provider under the direct supervision of a Physical Therapist (PT). When a patient begins physical therapy the PT performs an initial evaluation and establishes a plan of care. The PTA can then carry out most, if not all, of the treatment plan given by the PT.

PTA's can perform interventions such as instruction of therapeutic exercise, use of heat and cold, ultrasound, use of electricity, hands on techniques, and provide education for the patient. The PTA can also monitor progress through performing a variety of tests and measurements, documentation, and communicating with the advising PT.

The two primary differences between the PT and the PTA are their educations and the ability to establish the plan of care. Most Physical Therapists have either a Master or Doctorate Degree which entails 5-6 years of schooling depending on the institution. Physical Therapist Assistants earn an Associates Degree of 2 years. The other major difference is that the PT completes an evaluation, determines the diagnosis, and establishes the plan of care and goals for the individual. After the evaluation the PT then may delegate part or all of the treatment to the PTA.

Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants provide a team approach to the goals of increasing function, increasing mobility, and decreasing pain. This team approach can be very beneficial to a patient's rehabilitation. If you have any further questions contact your physician or local physical therapy clinic.