

# What is a Physical Therapist?

**Judy Simcoe, PTA**  
**Physical Therapist Assistant**  
**Ham Lake Physical Therapy**

Physical therapists are health care providers who are the experts in the examination and treatment of problems that affect a person's ability to move and function as well as they can in their daily lives.

Because people of all ages need to move and function, physical therapists work with patients and clients from newborns to the very aged, and in all types of settings, from hospitals, (even critically ill patients in the intensive care unit), outpatient clinics to the home, from school and to the workplace. A large part of a physical therapist's program is directed at preventing injury and loss of movement. For example, physical therapists work as consultants in industrial settings to improve workplace design and reduce the risk of overusing certain muscles or developing low back pain.

The cornerstones of physical therapist's treatments are therapeutic exercises and functional training. In addition to "hands on" care, physical therapists also educate patients to take care of themselves and to perform certain exercises on their own. Depending on the particular needs of a patient, physical therapists also may perform certain types of manual therapy to change joint movement or massage a muscle to promote proper movement and function.

Choosing a physical therapist who's right for you is the same way you might find the right doctor or dentist, or through recommendation from your doctor, family members or friends, or by checking telephone listings. One factor to consider is that physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are bound by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) to provide competent and compassionate care. Be aware that you always have the right to see the physical therapist of your choice.