

Hands-On Healing: A Deep Dive into Physical Therapy

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Essential Question(s)

How do physical therapists use specialized skills and techniques to help individuals recover from injuries, improve mobility, and manage pain?

Summary

The demand for physical therapists is expected to grow 14% by 2033, which is much faster than most careers. More people need help recovering from injury, improving mobility, and managing paint, which means physical therapists are becoming a vital part of a healthcare team. This series of activities will help students develop key skills necessary for a career in physical therapy. Students will practice injury prevention techniques such as taping and wrapping, explore concussion management strategies, and engage in real-world decision-making related to sports medicine. Additionally, students will gain hands-on experience in patient care and learn how to assess and adapt treatments for individuals across different age groups and conditions. This resource also includes opportunities for students to explore emergency scenarios, which can help them understand how physical therapists collaborate with other healthcare professionals in high-pressure situations. Physical therapists are compassionate, patient-focused problem-solvers who use their knowledge of body mechanics to help people live better lives. Through this resource, students will gain valuable experience in this field and help them decide if this rewarding career path is right for them.

Learning Goals

- Explore the physical therapist profession by engaging in hands-on activities and simulations to understand the skills, responsibilities, and challenges of the role.
- Develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and patient care skills through real-world training exercises and by assessing personal strengths and interests in relation to physical therapy.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—Hands-On Healing.pptx
- CER Organizer—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.docx
- CER Organizer—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- CER Organizer—Hands-On Healing.docx
- CER Organizer—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- Career Clusters—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- Career Clusters—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- Geriatric Simulation Reflection—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.docx
- Geriatric Simulation Reflection—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- Geriatric Simulation Reflection—Hands-On Healing.docx
- Geriatric Simulation Reflection—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- Point of Most Significance—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.docx
- Point of Most Significance—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- Point of Most Significance—Hands-On Healing.docx
- Point of Most Significance—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- Stethoscope Placement Guide—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- Stethoscope Placement Guide—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- Venn Diagram—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.docx
- Venn Diagram—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- Venn Diagram—Hands-On Healing.docx
- Venn Diagram—Hands-On Healing.pdf
- What? So What? Now What?—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.docx
- What? So What? Now What?—Hands-On Healing - Spanish.pdf
- What? So What? Now What?—Hands-On Healing.docx
- What? So What? Now What?—Hands-On Healing.pdf

Materials

Recommended Equipment and Materials

- Wearable Auscultation Trainer (one per classroom; linked)
- Geriatric Simulator (one per classroom; linked)
- Concussion Education Kit (one per classroom; linked)
- Taping and Wrapping Skills Sim Kit (one per classroom; linked)
- EMT Career Scenario Cards (one set per classroom; linked)
- Sports Medicine Career Scenario Cards (one set per classroom; linked)

Alternate Activities Materials List (optional)

- Activity Slides (attached; optional)
- Geriatric Simulation Reflection handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- Point of Most Significance handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- What? So What? Now What? handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- CER Organizer handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- Venn Diagram handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- Stethoscope Placement Guide handout (attached; optional; one per student)
- Career Clusters handout (attached; one per student)
- Petroleum jelly (or translucent scarf)
- Non-reading glasses or goggles
- Large gloves, socks, or mittens
- Paper clips
- Stethoscopes
- Rice

- Bucket or other container to hold rice
- Thick rubber gloves
- Headphones
- Athletic sports tape
- Pre-wrap athletic tape
- Dice

Overview

A person who helps people recover from injuries, manage pain, and regain movement is called a *physical therapist*, abbreviated PT. Physical therapists can work in hospitals, outpatient clinics, sports facilities, schools, and can even open their own private practices. PTs assess patients, develop personalized treatment plans, and use exercises, hands-on therapy, and specialized equipment to improve movement and reduce discomfort. The life of a physical therapist includes evaluating injuries, designing rehabilitation programs, educating patients on injury prevention, and tracking patient progress over time. The average salary for a physical therapist is approximately $99,710 per year, and experienced professionals typically earn over $130,000 per year.

Those interested in working in this field need a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree. This degree typically requires about seven years of education, including four years to earn a bachelor's degree and three years in a DPT program. After a PT completes their degree, they must pass a licensing exam before they begin practicing. Many physical therapists also pursue specialized certifications in areas such as sports therapy, neurology, or pediatrics to advance their careers.

Students in middle school and high school can start preparing for a career in physical therapy by taking science courses like biology and anatomy, participating in sports or fitness activities, and learning about basic injury prevention. Students can also volunteer at hospitals, rehabilitation centers, or with athletic trainers in order to gain hands-on experience.

Those interested in a profession in physical therapy need many skills, including:

- Communication skills
- Physical stamina
- Interpersonal skills
- Observation skills
- Time management

30 minutes

Station 1: Geriatric Simulation

Teacher's Note: Geriatric Simulator Purpose

The Geriatric Simulator tool engages students with a hands-on learning experience intended to help them develop empathy for and a deeper understanding of the physical, cognitive, and sensory challenges faced by older adults. Through the use of the wearable simulator, students will experience firsthand the effects of aging, including limited mobility, visual impairment, and changes in posture. By participating in these activities, students will gain a realistic perspective on aging, which will increase their awareness and sensitivity in interactions with older adults.

Use the curriculum provided with the **Geriatric Simulator** tool to guide students through an engrossing learning experience that highlights the physical, cognitive, and sensory challenges associated with aging. Have students take turns using the wearable simulator. Guide them to understand the effects of aging, such as limited mobility, visual impairments, and postural changes.

Additionally, consider incorporating discussions and activities that explore topics like gerontology, hearing loss, and cognitive changes due to aging. Use the presentation slides, student activities, and assessments provided with the Geriatric Simulator to reinforce learning and encourage meaningful reflections.

Alternate Activities

If you choose not to purchase the Geriatric Simulator, consider facilitating the following alternate activities using the attached handouts and **Activity Slides**. Display **slides 3–4** and introduce the essential question and learning goals to students. Transition through **slides 5–8** and present an overview of the physical therapist profession. Tell students that the purpose of these activities is to allow them to experience the challenges of aging, including vision impairment, limited range of motion, and stooped posture.

Teacher's Note: Activity Setup

Prior to facilitating these alternate activities, ensure that you have all of the necessary supplies. For the limited vision simulation, prepare a pair of goggles or old glasses by smearing petroleum jelly on the lenses, or prepare a translucent scarf. For the limited dexterity simulation, prepare large gloves, mitts, or socks and small items like paper clips. For the limited spine mobility simulation, prepare a mobility course around the classroom with low obstacles and chairs.

Display **slide 9** and guide students through the following activities:

1. **Limited vision simulation:** Have students cover their eyes with the provided scarf or pair of goggles or glasses with petroleum jelly smeared on the lenses. Have them then complete simple tasks like reading small text on a piece of paper with their eyes covered.
2. **Limited dexterity simulation:** Have students wear large gloves, socks, or mittens on their hands. Have them pick up small objects like paper clips or perform simple tasks with their hands like tying their shoelaces while wearing the gloves, socks, or mittens.
3. **Limited spine mobility simulation:** Have students bend forward and complete the prepared mobility course.

After students complete each simulation, distribute one copy of the attached **Geriatric Simulation Reflection** handout to each student and move to **slide 10**. Briefly review the prompts on the handout, then have students work individually to respond to the prompts. Invite students to share out their responses and facilitate a whole class discussion that encourages students to reflect on their experiences.

45 minutes

Station 2: Auscultation

Teacher's Note: Wearable Auscultation Trainer Purpose

The Wearable Auscultation Trainer tool offers an interactive learning experience that allows students to develop essential clinical skills in auscultation, palpation, and patient care. The trainer allows students to practice rib palpation, stethoscope placement, and sound recognition through real-life patient simulations. The tool features accurately replicated heart, lung, and bowel sounds and allows students to gain hands-on experience in identifying anatomical landmarks and distinguishing normal and abnormal auscultation findings. Through guided lessons and interactive activities, this curriculum enhances students' ability to perform auscultation while reinforcing the importance of patient privacy and dignity in healthcare.

Use the curriculum provided with the **Wearable Auscultation Trainer** tool to guide students to develop essential clinical skills in auscultation, palpation, and patient care. Have students practice rib palpation, stethoscope placement, and sound recognition using real-life patient simulations.

Provide opportunities for students to identify anatomical landmarks and distinguish between normal and abnormal heart, lung, and bowel sounds. Reinforce student learning by using the curriculum's presentation slides, student materials, and assessment tools.

Alternate Activities

If you choose not to purchase the Wearable Auscultation Trainer, consider facilitating the following alternate activities using the attached handouts and Activity Slides. Tell students that the purpose of these activities is to allow them to practice listening to common heart, lung, and bowel sounds. Express that understanding where and how to place a stethoscope is essential in order to get the best results.

Play the following sound recordings for students:

1. Heart sounds
2. Lung sounds
3. Bowel sounds

Teacher's Note: Student Levels of Comfort

For this next portion of the activities, be considerate about how you pair students. Students must listen for specific sounds in different locations on their partners' bodies. Encourage students to be considerate of their partners' personal space as they listen for sounds. If certain students do not feel comfortable partnering with a classmate, allow them to use a stethoscope to listen to their own body sounds instead.

Organize students into pairs. Distribute one copy of the attached **Stethoscope Placement Guide** handout to each pair and display **slide 11**. Have each student use their handout as a reference to properly place the stethoscope on their own chest. Have each student's partner then listen for the heartbeat sound. Have them repeat this process to have each partner listen for lung sounds on the back and bowel sounds on the abdomen. Instruct partners to switch roles and repeat the process. After all students have had the opportunity to use the stethoscope, play the heart, lung, and bowel sounds again and have students identify them.

Move to **slide 12** and facilitate a whole group discussion over the following questions:

- Why is it important for physical therapists to assess heart, lung, and bowel sounds when creating a treatment plan for a patient?
- How can abnormal sounds, such as wheezing or crackles, impact a patient's ability to participate in physical therapy exercises?
- In what ways might a physical therapist adjust a rehabilitation plan for a patient with poor circulation or irregular heart sounds?

Express to students that physical therapists often assess breathing patterns, circulation, and gastrointestinal function in order to tailor treatment plans for patients. Explain that by practicing auscultation, students gain a better understanding of how heart, lung, and bowel sounds provide critical information about a patient's health and how these factors impact mobility, endurance, and rehabilitation progress. Tell students that recognizing abnormal sounds allows physical therapists to make informed decisions about exercise tolerance, positioning, and breathing techniques to support patient recovery.

Teacher's Note: Expert Facilitation

Consider contacting your school nurse or nursing students from a local college to help facilitate this activity. Their expertise and real-world experience with the materials and scenarios will enhance the learning experience. Additionally, this can provide students with valuable exposure to potential career paths in healthcare.

45 minutes

Station 3: Concussion Education

Teacher's Note: Concussion Education Kit Purpose

The Concussion Education Kit tool provides students with hands-on learning experiences to recognize concussion symptoms and understand best practices for treatment and prevention. The included curriculum engages students in interactive activities, including a wearable simulation, that allow them to experience the effects of a concussion firsthand. Students will gain an understanding of the physiological impact of concussions on the brain and body and be introduced to traumatic brain injury (TBI) scenarios. Through these immersive experiences, students will develop a deeper understanding of concussions and their consequences.

Use the provided curriculum included with the **Concussion Education Kit** to guide students through hands-on learning experiences that guide them to recognize concussion symptoms and understand best practices for treatment and prevention.

Provide opportunities for students to explore real-world traumatic brain injury (TBI) scenarios. Facilitate discussions on treatment and prevention strategies. Use the curriculum, student activities, and assessments provided with the kit to reinforce learning and enhance understanding. Ensure that students understand how to identify concussion symptoms so they can properly address them.

Alternate Activities

Teacher's Note: Headphone Volume

As part of this activity, students are challenged to listen to loud music as they complete a task. Prior to this task, designate a volume level for the music. Ensure that the selected volume level is loud enough to distract students, but not loud enough to cause hearing loss. Consider having students also watch the video *How Old is Your Hearing? - Interactive Test for your Ears*, or provide a demonstration about how girls can be more sensitive to noise than boys using common classroom objects or activities, like nails on a chalkboard.

If you do not have access to the Concussion Education kit, display **slide 13** and share with students that sensory loss, vision impairment, and sensory hypersensitivity are three symptoms that concussion patients may experience. Facilitate the following alternate activities:

1. **Sensory loss simulation:** Place items in a bucket filled with rice. Have each student wear a thick rubber glove on their dominant hand and reach into the bucket. Ask them to identify the items they feel in the bucket.
2. **Vision impairment simulation:** Smear petroleum jelly on the lenses of goggles or old glasses. Have students take turns wearing the goggles or glasses and ask them to attempt to complete a series of activities.
3. **Sensory hypersensitivity simulation:** Have students wear headphones playing loud music. Give each student a worksheet and have them attempt to complete the worksheet with the headphones on.

Distribute the attached **What? So What? Now What?** handout to each student and transition to **slide 14**. Have them reflect on the activities by responding to the prompts on the handout.

45 minutes

Station 4: Taping and Wrapping

Teacher's Note: Taping and Wrapping Skills Sim Kit Purpose

The Taping and Wrapping Skills Sim Kit guides students through the basics of taping, wrapping, and bracing techniques used in sports medicine. This activity provides hands-on learning experiences that help students learn how to properly address injuries that need wrapping and bracing.

Use the curriculum included with the **Taping and Wrapping Skills Sim Kit** to set up stations where students can learn about different tapes, braces, and wraps and explore the pros and cons of each method. Provide opportunities for students to practice taping, wrapping, and bracing for different injuries, and time for students to familiarize themselves with different splints and braces.

The kit contains various prompts that have students demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge, practices, and skills associated with taping and wrapping. Use these prompts at the end of each lesson to check student understanding.

Alternate Activities

If you do not have access to the Taping and Wrapping Skills Sim Kit, guide students in understanding the fundamentals of taping, wrapping, and bracing. Facilitate the following activities that give students opportunities to practice real-world injury prevention and treatment techniques.

Display **slide 15** and play the video *What is the Best Ankle Support for a Game? | Ankle Brace vs Ankle Tape*. Have students follow along with the video to identify pros and cons between wearing a brace and taping.

Show **slide 16** and play the video *DJO Roadshow Powerhouse Physio Taping vs Bracing*. After watching both videos, encourage students to share out their experiences with taping or bracing.

Display **slide 17** and distribute one copy of the attached **CER Organizer** handout to each student. Review the handout and introduce the instructions for the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) instructional strategy. Explain that students should first create a claim about taping used for injury prevention and rehabilitation and record that claim in the space provided on the handout.

Sample Student Claims

Student claims should include information about using taping techniques to assess injuries. Consider providing an example claim similar to the following:

“Taping is a more effective method than bracing for injury prevention and rehabilitation.”

After students record their claims, display **slide 18** and have them watch the video *Sports Taping for the Ankle - The Center for Sports Medicine*. Then, transition to **slide 19** and have them watch the video *How to Tape a Thumb for Sports - Presented by Pivotal Motion Physiotherapy*.

Have students use information from the videos as evidence to support their claims. Allow students time to record evidence in their handouts, then have them record their reasoning in the space provided. Encourage them to describe how their evidence supports their claim when they write their reasoning.

Teacher's Note: Station Preparation

Prior to this portion of the activity, set up two seperate taping stations with the appropriate materials. Prepare one station for ankle taping and one station for thumb taping.

Display **slide 20** and have students find a partner. Divide pairs evenly between the ankle and thumb taping stations. Have partner take turns properly taping each other's thumbs and ankles. Once a pair has completed the activity at one station, have them switch stations.

Move to **slide 21**. Use the 5W Cube instructional strategy to engage students in a reflection on their learning. Ask for volunteers to roll the die and answer one of the following questions on the slide that correlates to the rolled number.

1. **What** are some common injuries that require taping or bracing in physical therapy?
2. **When** would a physical therapist choose taping over bracing, and what factors might influence this decision for different types of injuries?
3. **Why** do some athletes or patients prefer bracing over taping, and how do their personal experiences or specific needs impact this preference?
4. **How** might a physical therapist adapt their injury prevention approach for an athlete who frequently plays back-to-back games?
5. **Who** should have final say in deciding whether an athlete uses taping or a brace—the physical therapist, the coach, the athlete, or a combination of all three? Why?
6. **Where** do physical therapists typically use taping and bracing techniques, and how might the setting (sports field, clinic, hospital) influence the choice between the two?

Dice Options

If you do not have dice, consider using Google Dice Roller to have students roll a die.

Teacher's Note: Expert Facilitation

Consider inviting an athletic director, coach, or athletic trainer from your school to facilitate this activity. Their expertise and real-world experience with the materials and scenarios will enhance the learning process. Furthermore, this experience provides students with valuable insight into potential career paths in sports medicine and athletics.

45 minutes

Station 5: EMT and Sports Medicine

Teacher's Note: EMT and Sports Medicine Careers

Physical therapists require many of the same skills and training as EMTs and other sports medicine professionals. These skills can include things like injury assessment and the ability to recognize and respond to various injuries. Similar to EMTs, physical therapists must be able to assess the severity of injuries and provide immediate, safe care, while also using expertise in sports medicine to design effective rehabilitation programs for recovery.

The EMT and Sports Medicine Career Scenario Cards guide students in developing a deeper understanding of the skills, responsibilities, and critical thinking abilities required in physical therapy. These cards can also serve as effective icebreakers. They can be used to spark discussion on communication, adaptability, and quick thinking.

Use the **EMT and Sports Medicine Career Scenario Cards** to create a station and facilitate the following activities:

1. Present a scenario to the class, and prompt students to analyze the situation, explore possible responses, and justify their decisions.
2. Organize students into small groups and give each group a card or set of cards. Have group members collaborate to find a solution to the scenario and provide peer feedback to each other.
3. Encourage individual reflection through journaling and responding to key questions associated with each scenario. Reflection aids students in assessing their decision-making skills through written responses.
4. Have students engage in role-playing to bring the scenarios to life, provide real-time responses, and practice teamwork. Assign each student a role like a medical professional, patient, or bystander.

Optional Reflection Activity

Consider distributing the attached **Point of Most Significance** handout to each student. Use the Point of Most Significance instructional strategy to encourage students to reflect on what they learned about different roles in healthcare. Encourage them to consider how these experiences relate to their interests and potential career paths.

Alternate Activities

If you do not have access to the EMT and Sports Medicine Career Scenario Cards, guide students in investigating the careers of a sports medicine physician and an EMT.

Display **slide 22** and have students watch the video introduction of a sports medicine physician, *A Day in the Life | Primary Care Sports Medicine Physician Olabode Agaja, DO*.

Move to **slide 23** and have students watch the video *A Day in the Life of a Paramedic ft. an EMT | Indeed*.

Complete the station by moving to **slide 24** and distributing one copy of the attached **Venn Diagram** handout to each student. Review the instructions for the Venn Diagram instructional strategy. Encourage students to work together to list skills and responsibilities for EMT careers in the left circle. Have students repeat the process for the sports medicine physician and physical therapist circles. Facilitate a whole-class discussion about what skills and responsibilities these careers have in common. Have students record shared skills and responsibilities in the overlapping parts of the diagram.

Research Rationale

Research demonstrates that early development of occupational knowledge through school career education programs supports students in building an understanding of the world of work and available career opportunities (Ginevra et al., 2024; Godbey & Gordon, 2019; James, 2024; Kim & Lee, 2023). The middle and high school years are fundamental for students to explore careers and develop transferable skills to help them succeed in high school and beyond (James, 2024; Kim & Lee, 2023). Where career exploration programs involve experiential learning, student engagement is increased, improving graduation rates, and college and career readiness (Godbey & Gordon, 2019; James, 2024; Kim & Lee, 2023).

Resources

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