

Exercise Physiology

Professional Activities

Exercise Physiologists oversee the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of health and fitness; rehabilitation of heart disease and other chronic diseases and disabilities; and the professional guidance and counsel of athletes and others interested in sports training.

While just about anyone can call themselves a “personal trainer,” an Exercise Physiologist is a health care professional who has completed a degree in exercise physiology and/or has been certified by the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP). The Board Certified Exercise Physiologist (EPC) is trained to:

- Administer exercise stress tests in healthy and unhealthy populations
- Evaluate a person’s overall health, with special attention to cardiovascular function and metabolism
- Develop individualized exercise prescriptions to increase physical fitness, strength, endurance, and flexibility
- Design customized exercise programs to meet health care needs and athletic performance goals

According to ASEP, “scientific papers by Exercise Physiologists support the health benefits of regular exercise. Moreover, it is clear that an active lifestyle protects from many diseases.”

Doctors often prescribe exercise for patients who have been diagnosed with diabetes, cardiac (heart) disease or pulmonary (lung) disease. For these patients, exercise is a type of medical treatment, just like surgery or prescription drugs. Doctors refer these patients to Exercise Physiologists to ensure that the patient benefits from a medically sound, personalized exercise program.

Exercise Physiologists work in health care and athletic training settings in colleges and universities, athletic programs, fitness facilities, corporate wellness programs, military training centers, rehabilitation clinics and hospitals. Aside from the Exercise Physiology title, they may obtain employment as Clinicians, Sports Directors, Coaches or Trainers, Wellness Directors, Exercise Managers, Program Coordinators, Rehabilitation Specialists or several other titles.

Sports medicine and athletic training facilities employ Exercise Physiologists to create programs that help athletes reduce the number of injuries and recover faster from them. Makers of athletic equipment hire Exercise Physiologists to design sports gear. Exercise Physiologists also run their own businesses as sports or athletic performance consultants.

For patients referred by a doctor, Exercise Physiologists evaluate the patient’s medical and fitness needs and design a customized exercise program that promotes individual goals. Exercise Physiologists also develop exercise plans for patients who want to maintain their health, reduce their risk of disease or speed recovery from certain types of illness or surgery.

Educational Requirements

Today, with accreditation and the EPC credential, more employers are hiring the bachelor-prepared Exercise

Physiologist. In cardiac rehabilitation, most employers still require a master's degree.

Look for an ASEP exercise physiology program that is accredited by The Center for Exercise Physiology-online. The academic coursework in exercise physiology should include:

- Kinesiology (functional anatomy)
- Biomechanics
- Sports nutrition
- Exercise physiology
- Psychophysiology
- Cardiac rehabilitation
- Exercise testing and prescription
- ECG interpretation
- Exercise physiology research
- Statistics
- An internship provides hands-on experience developing and monitoring exercise programs.

To become board certified, you must pass an examination administered by the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. The exam should test both academic knowledge and hands-on laboratory and practical skills. In addition, Exercise Physiologists are expected to take continuing education courses throughout their careers.

Academic Programs

[Benedictine University](#)

[Eastern Illinois University](#)

[Elmhurst College](#)

[Illinois State University](#)

[Loyola University](#)

[North Central College](#)

[Southern Illinois University Carbondale](#)

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#)

[Trinity Christian College](#)

[University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)

[Western Illinois University](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Salaries for Exercise Physiologists vary by location, certification and experience. Employment opportunities in exercise physiology are expanding with increased awareness of ASEP professional credibility, and as doctors, patients, and society learn of the value of exercise as an important health care treatment.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$17.76	\$23.05	\$37.00
	Annual	\$36,930	\$47,940	\$76,950
Illinois	Hourly	\$18.19	\$27.54	\$36.38

	Annual	\$37,840	\$57,280	\$75,670
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State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Projected Annual Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Exercise Physiologists	18,000	20,400	13%	1,500
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Projected Annual Job Openings ¹
	2018	2028		
Exercise Physiologists	800	810	+1%	50

Professional Organizations

American Society of Exercise Physiologists (asep.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/exercise-physiologists.htm>

O*NET OnLine (<https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/29-1128.00>)

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