

Question: What is an Athletic Trainer?

Answer: Not what you might think...

By: Stephanie Peterson, ATC

Have you ever watched a football game (basketball game, baseball game, soccer game...) and seen a player get hurt? All of a sudden, there are people wearing fanny packs circa 1983 running out onto the field, and they begin poking and prodding the injured athlete, pulling on a leg, pressing an arm, whatever the situation calls for. What you may not realize is that these people are highly trained, highly specialized, Certified Athletic Trainers (ATC). I am one of these people: my name is Stephanie, and I am an Athletic Trainer.

So what is an Athletic Trainer? First and foremost, we are NOT personal trainers, but we'll get to that delineation later. The National Athletic Trainer's Association (NATA) defines the profession as encompassing "the prevention, diagnosis, and intervention of emergency, acute, and chronic medical conditions involving impairment, functional limitations, and disabilities." In other words, we are involved in every aspect of the athlete's injury management from the point of injury itself, through the rehabilitative process, and finally back out onto the field of play. We work with coaches to help design exercises and drills to prevent injuries, and if an injury does occur, work with the athlete's doctor to get them back to play as quickly and safely as possible. We can respond to any type of medical emergency from sudden illness, to concussion, to a spine injury and everything in between. ATCs are certified in First Aid, CPR and AED, and must keep their certifications up to date. Generally, we deal with orthopedic injuries and that is where our expertise lies. The poking and prodding that was being done to our injured player was actually us looking for any deformity, and the pulling and pushing was how we test a ligament to test its structural stability.



I mentioned that Athletic Trainers are different than personal trainers, and the biggest difference can be seen when looking at the level of education. I'm not saying that all personal trainers are uneducated; in fact there are some that majored in exercise physiology which is an intense and complicated field of study. Others have similar degrees and backgrounds, and are exempt from this group. That being said, it is quite possible to go online and get your personal trainer certification in 4 days with 3 easy payments of \$99.99. The educational requirements, and I will again reference the NATA, state that "students must graduate with bachelors or masters degree from an accredited professional athletic training education program and pass a comprehensive test administered by the Board of Certification. Once certified, they must meet ongoing continuing education requirements in order to remain certified...Accredited programs include formal instruction in areas such as injury/illness prevention, first aid and emergency care, assessment of injury/illness, human anatomy and physiology, therapeutic modalities, and nutrition. Classroom learning is enhanced through clinical education experiences. More than 70 percent of certified athletic trainers hold at least a master's degree."

You can find us everywhere. We work at physical therapy clinics, high schools, colleges, and professional sports teams. We can be found at gyms, in hospitals, on military bases, industrial

facilities and with performing arts groups. Personally, I work for Sports Plus Physical Therapy where I spend half of my day treating patients, and the other half at a local high school. You can look for me on the sidelines of local sporting events. You'll recognize me: I'll be the one with the fanny pack.