



Providing Occupational Therapy to Those Who Need It

You might have heard the term “occupational therapy” and wondered what it meant. Many people hear the term and immediately think occupational therapy jobs are like vocational and career counselor jobs. It turns out that occupational therapy is totally unrelated to vocational counseling, though it is about work — the work of daily living.

Occupational therapy is a type of allied health care that involves helping people to effectively complete the tasks of daily living. Some examples of duties performed in occupational therapy include helping people adapt to traumatic injuries, helping disabled or learning delayed children navigate their physical and social environments, and helping the elderly cope with memory loss or other kinds of disability.

Occupational Therapy for Adults

Let’s consider a specific example. A man has been injured, and his right arm has become permanently paralyzed as a result of the accident. There are many things that he will need to re-learn to do. If he is right handed, he will need to learn to write with his left hand. He’ll need to be able to bathe, feed, and clothe himself with the use of just one hand. His therapy might include strengthening exercises in the working hand, manipulation of the paralyzed arm to keep the muscles from atrophying so that the arm will retain as normal an appearance as possible, and instruction in the use of adaptive equipment.

Occupational Therapy for Children

A second example of the type of person an occupational therapist might help is a child who has delayed fine neuro-motor development. The occupational therapist will assess the child through a variety of task-based tests, and will design a therapy program using activities that the child will enjoy, like drawing, molding, picking up small objects, and similar activities. The therapist may instruct the child’s parents in techniques that can be utilized at home.

Occupational Therapy for the Elderly

A final example of a patient helped by occupational therapists is an elderly person in the early stages of dementia and memory loss. A therapist can help elderly people retain their independence by teaching them safety and coping skills, like list making, for example. Perhaps the therapist will help

design a checklist for use by an elderly woman that she will need to complete each time she leaves her apartment. She will be sure the stove is turned off, the door is locked, and her heart medication is in her purse, for example.

Where do Occupational Therapist Professionals Work?

[Occupational therapy jobs](#) at hospitals, clinics, and schools are plentiful. Occupational therapy jobs at hospitals focus on providing inpatient care to people suffering from short-term trauma or illness, and may focus on patients with chronic illnesses who will have a lengthy inpatient stay. Occupational therapists (and occupational therapy assistants and aides) focus on outpatient therapy in private and public clinics. In schools, occupational therapy professionals often work with children in special education programs. Occupational therapy professionals may also work in nursing homes, hand therapy clinics, and home health settings, to name just a few.

What Kind of Training is required?

Because there are different levels of [jobs for occupational therapy](#) professionals, required training will depend on where you want to function as part of an occupational therapy team. Licensed occupational therapists require the highest level of education, and must complete a master’s degree to obtain licensure. An occupational therapy assistant must usually complete a two-year degree and licensing requirements to become a certified occupational therapy assistant (OTA). Occupational therapy aides may not require special training. Occupational therapy aides work under the supervision of occupational therapy assistants and occupational therapists. Working as an aide can be a good way to see if occupational therapy is a career that interests you, and can lead as a stepping-stone to an occupational therapy assistant program.

What is the Role of Each Occupational Therapy Professional?

The occupational therapist is the head of a therapy team.



Occupational Therapy Career Tips

The therapist evaluates patients, plans treatment regimens, and oversees the treatment process. The therapist must adjust therapy based on the patient's progress over time. The assistant's role is to help in planning and make recommendations to the therapist, and to implement the therapy plan. The aide's role is limited generally to providing physical assistance (helping patients stand and sit, for example), and helping clean and prepare the therapy area for each session.

Jobs for Occupational Therapy Professionals

[Jobs for occupational therapy](#) assistants and aides, as well as for occupational therapists are expected to experience

continued growth for the next several years. This is in part because of the surge in the elderly population, making geriatrics a field in which more occupational therapy professionals are desperately needed. Opportunities in [occupational therapy jobs at](#) inpatient and outpatient facilities should continue to be good. Jobs for occupational therapy in pediatrics, acute care, and home health are also in demand.

If you enjoy studying health related subjects and would like to work in a field that integrates physical, mental, and emotional health, occupational therapy is a career you should consider. It offers excellent job outlook, good pay, and the opportunity to help others through a richly rewarding career.

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