



Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy is skilled treatment that helps individuals achieve independence in all facets of their lives. It gives people the “skills for the job of living” necessary for independent and satisfying lives. Services typically include:

- Customized treatment programs to improve one’s ability to perform daily activities
- Comprehensive home and job site evaluations with adaption recommendations
- Performance skills assessments and treatment
- Adaptive equipment recommendations and usage training
- Guidance to family members and caregivers

Occupational therapy practitioners are skilled professionals whose education includes the study of human growth and development with specific emphasis on social, emotional and physiological effects of illness and injury.

The occupational therapist enters the field with a bachelors, masters or doctoral degree. The occupational therapy assistant generally earns an associate degree.

Practitioners must complete supervised clinical internships in a variety of health care settings, and pass a national examination. Most states also regulate occupational therapy practice.

A wide variety of people can benefit from occupational therapy, including those with:

- work-related injuries including lower back problems or repetitive stress injuries
- limitations following a stroke or heart attack
- arthritis, multiple sclerosis or other serious chronic conditions
- birth injuries, learning problems or developmental disabilities
- mental health or behavioral problems including Alzheimer’s, schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress.
- problems with substance use or eating disorders
- burns, spinal cord injuries or amputations
- broken bones or other injuries from falls, sport injuries or accidents
- vision or cognitive problems that threaten their ability to drive

One Case Study: How Occupational Therapy Works in Schools

Every day children and adults have or develop health conditions that significantly affect their ability to manage their daily lives. With the help of occupational therapy, many of these individuals can achieve or regain a higher level of independence. When skill and strength cannot be developed or improved, occupational therapy offers creative solutions and alternatives for carrying out daily activities.

Developmental Problems:

Tommy weighed just three pounds at birth. Doctors warned his parents to be on the lookout for problems that might affect his development. In the hospital nursery, an occupational therapist helped ensure that Tommy was taking in enough nourishment. As a toddler, Tommy attended a Head Start program where occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants provided activities to aid his physical and mental development. For youngsters like Tommy the “job of living” requires basic skills such as eating, playing and interacting successfully with family members and friends.

As Tommy transitions to preschool, he may receive an occupational therapy evaluation. Depending on the results of the assessment, he may begin to work on fundamental skills such as fine and perceptual motor development, academic readiness, self-help skills and social behavioral abilities.