

What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy (OT) is a client-oriented approach to life skill development. Occupational therapy practitioners use their skills to help individuals prepare for daily living despite impairments, activity limitations, and/or restrictions.

Occupations refer to everyday activities or tasks that have value and meaning to a person and that are essential to his/her identity. Getting dressed, dialing a phone, using a computer, writing a check, driving a car, fishing, or watching a movie at the mall are all examples of activities of daily living, also called occupations.

Occupational therapy practitioners use meaningful tasks or occupations to promote and restore function, health, and wellness to people who have experienced a decreased ability to participate in meaningful daily life activities because of developmental delays, physical illness or injury, mental health conditions, or just the process of aging.

An occupational therapy practitioner might:

- Devise a substitute method for holding a spoon or a fork to enable a person who has lost grip strength to feed himself independently.
- Help older adults re-engage in activities they love but now refrain from doing because of physical limitations or fear of injury.
- Teach adults with spinal cord injuries how to use assistive technology that will enable them to live productive and meaningful lives.
- Create community programs for people with emotional or mental disabilities to facilitate health and wellness behaviors.
- Assist teachers in redesigning classroom environments so children with attention deficit disorders are less easily distracted.
- Consult in schools to help children overcome writing difficulties and other learning challenges.
- Assist an older couple to care for one another in their own home by making it user friendly.
- Design, fabricate, and apply a splint for an individual with a hand injury to assist in the recovery process.

To learn more about occupational therapy, visit the website for the American Occupational Therapy Association (<http://www.aota.org>) and select the “Consumers” tab.