

# Occupational Therapy

## Introduction

# Physiotherapy in Abbotsford for Occupational Therapy

Welcome to Hillcrest Physiotherapy Clinic's guide to Occupational Therapy.

Occupational Therapy (OT) is a profession that works closely with Physiotherapy in the recovery from injury or illness.



### **This guide will help you understand:**

- â what is Occupational Therapy
- â where Occupational Therapists work
- â what is the difference between an Occupational Therapist and a Physiotherapist
- â what to expect when visiting an Occupational Therapist
- â what the role of an Occupational Therapist is in orthopaedic injuries

## **What is Occupational Therapy?**

### **What is Occupational Therapy?**

Occupational Therapy is a health profession in which the therapist's focus is on the occupational needs of the patient. The term 'occupation' includes a variety of tasks in the life of a patient, including all those physical and mental jobs that the patient needs to do in order to look after themselves (self-care), enjoy life (leisure), work, and to continue all the activities they are normally involved in in their personal life and their community. OTs help their patients to live independently and help them improve their wellbeing and the quality of their life.

An OT actively collaborates with their patient to define and achieve occupational performance goals that are meaningful to the patient themselves. The OT then evaluates the environments in which their patient works, plays and lives in order to minimize barriers and maximize their patient's ability to participate. Once the goals that need to be achieved are agreed upon, the OT uses everyday activities as the foundation for therapeutic interventions. The OT will provide advice and any aids that may be needed to allow the patient to independently move back to managing each 'occupation' in their life.

### ***A Case Example:***

An OT may be involved in the care of an elderly patient who has fallen, badly broken her wrist, and required a hospital stay for surgery. Prior to the fall, the patient was living at home on her own without any outside help, and would like to return to doing the same but is worried about cooking for herself after the break to her dominant arm.

The OT involved will:

- work with the patient in a simulated kitchen in the hospital before the client goes home in order to ensure she has the ability to manage the goal of cooking (and eating) on her own at home.
- practice steps leading up to achieving the goal (i.e. getting items out of a cupboard, making the meal, pouring a drink, eating from a bowl etc.) with the patient.
- provide advice regarding ways to make the task easier and more efficient,
- provide any aids needed to assist the patient safely doing the task (i.e.: perhaps a large handled spoon will be required in order for the patient to grip the spoon without pain).
- ensure that the patient is safe in performing the task and if necessary, may go to the patient's home to ensure the task can be safely and independently done when she is in her own environment.
- help the patient to identify other areas (occupations) in her life where the healing arm may be an impairment to functioning as she used to.
- address other areas if they feel necessary and will provide advice, task practice, and any required aids to allow the patient to safely and independently manage those tasks as well.

If the OT feels that the patient cannot safely and independently manage the needed tasks due to her healing arm or any other reasons, the OT will engage with other professionals (i.e.: homecare help, physiotherapists, social work) to ensure the patient is safe and well taken care of once they are discharged from the hospital.

## **Where Do Occupational Therapists Work?**

### **Where Do Occupational Therapists Work?**

OTs can be commonly found working in places such as hospitals, private clinics, schools or going directly to patient's homes, among other places. In addition, OTs may specialize their practice and focus on working with a specific age, group or disability. For example, they may work specifically with children, patients with neurological disorders, patients with mental illnesses, or with individuals who have orthopaedic issues such as a hip or knee replacement.

## **What is the Difference between an Occupational Therapist and a Physiotherapist?**

### **What is the Difference between an Occupational Therapist and a Physiotherapist?**

In many cases OT's work closely with Physiotherapists (PT) but the two professions are not the same.

### **Physiotherapists:**

PTs are musculoskeletal and movement specialists and also specialize in advice regarding injury or re-injury prevention. PTs address a patient's physical deficits such as their strength, range of motion, balance, mobility, endurance, proprioception (knowing where your body or limbs are in space) and pain issues. Physiotherapy attempts to maximize physical function in order for a patient to have the appropriate physical ability (strength, range of motion, balance, and joint control) to return to doing their everyday tasks

including work and recreation activities. PTs may need to use hands-on therapy in order to accomplish this or work with patients by doing specific exercises that improve these physical abilities.

## **Occupational Therapists:**

OTs, as described above, work more closely with both evaluating and improving a patient's current physical and mental abilities in order for the patient to get back to the meaningful activities of their daily life such as eating, washing, toileting, writing, sleeping, getting in and out of a car, mental activities, and mobility etc. An OT may need to provide special equipment that patients use in order to be able to carry out their daily tasks due to their injury or illness.

## **Commonalities and Distinctions:**

Sometimes it is difficult to draw a line in the sand distinctly between where OT or PT ends and the other begins. There are several areas of recovery that both an OT or a PT can address, and often have to address if the other profession is not available in an individual circumstance, as in hand therapy, for example. That being said, however, the two professions are both highly trained in their specific areas; there are certain aspects of rehabilitation that OTs are experts in and also specific aspects of rehabilitation that PTs are experts in. Both professions are familiar with working with one another and are also experts in knowing when to pass a particular aspect of patient care on to their rehabilitative counterpart. As often as possible OTs and PTs will both work collaboratively on a team in order to assist patients.

One common aspect for sure in all cases is that both OTs and PTs have a goal of returning patients to their maximum ability and function and to get them back to what is most important to them in life, as quickly and as safely as possible.

## **What Should I Expect When Visiting An Occupational Therapist?**

### **What Should I Expect When Visiting An Occupational Therapist?**

When working with an OT, you will begin by participating in an initial assessment. He or she will assess your abilities and lifestyle that you had prior to your injury, surgery or illness, as well as your expectations of your lifestyle following.

The initial assessment will include a verbal interview followed by a physical exam of your functional abilities, mobility, and physical strength and endurance. The OT may ask you to perform several tasks that you would do throughout your normal day to determine how well you can do them with your injury or illness. The assessment may also include going to your home in order to review required adaptations, tools or equipment that you might need. If necessary, the OT will also carry out an assessment of your mental capabilities and deficits.

After your assessment your OT will identify individual strengths, deficits and priorities and then suggest modifications to improve function and participation in your everyday tasks.



Assessments are personalized, taking into account the tasks and needs specific to you, within a particular environment such as your home, workplace, school, community or vehicle, depending on what applies to you.

The goals of an assessment and the interventions are to ensure you are comfortable and in control of your activities of daily living, such as taking care of yourself, engaging in paid or unpaid work, and enjoying your leisure time.

Your OT may ask you to fill out a survey or an ‘assessment tool’ to evaluate your perceived abilities and limitations, symptoms or health issues, and rate your satisfaction with your performance in your everyday tasks. These ratings will serve as a benchmark to prioritize treatment and measure progress at key midpoints and at the end of your treatment. They may also ask you to fill out a form which relates more to your ability to perform certain mental functions.

If after an assessment your OT feels that the assistance of other health care professionals, such as a PT or a speech pathologist, is required to attain your rehabilitation goals, your OT will engage with the required health care professional.

Once a treatment plan has been made, then your OT will focus therapy sessions on achieving the goals that have been set out. Specific tasks will be broken down and be practiced methodically in order to achieve the overall final goals. These tasks may include physical tasks, such as practicing dressing or undressing, practicing cooking or making meals, or mental tasks, such as memory or problem solving games.



## **What Is The Role Of An Occupational Therapist in Orthopaedic Injuries?**

### **What Is The Role Of An Occupational Therapist in Orthopaedic Injuries?**

The role of an OT in orthopedics is to assist the patient to manage and overcome the limitations they experience due to their current orthopaedic condition or injury so that they can participate in their daily tasks. For example, if you have had a knee replacement surgery you will likely require a shower bench and/or a bathtub handle in order to shower independently since it could be unsafe for you to get down into your tub after the surgery, or even to stand in your shower for the length of time needed. The OT will provide access to the bench and handle and will teach you how to properly use them.

You may also have difficulty getting your lower body dressed after your surgery so a shoehorn and reacher may be provided and your OT will also practice using these tools with you.

Your OT may also help arrange for a wheelchair parking pass while your walking tolerance is limited.

In some cases of serious injury or illness or when the patient is elderly or has decreased mental capacity the OT may need to consult with the family of the patient, the doctor or specialist in charge of the treatment as well as other treating therapists, such as PTs or speech pathologists to develop a program that will best suit the expectations of all those involved in the patient's recovery.



## Conclusion

In short, an OT evaluates the relationship between the patient, their environment and the occupation at hand and strives to facilitate improved function, satisfaction and independence.

OTs can work in a variety of settings and often specifically work with patients with orthopaedic injuries to ensure that they can either return to their previous level of function or that they are well-equipped and can safely manage a modified level of function while they deal with the injury or illness at hand. OTs often work in close collaboration with physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals.

Occupational therapy is a very important part in the recovery of many injuries and/or illnesses and is proven to increase the ability to manage everyday tasks and even reduce the need for other health interventions.