



## Health Career Directory

### Occupational Therapist

#### Overview

Occupational therapists help people who experience challenges to participate in the activities of everyday life. These challenges can be due to impairment of body structure, a change in function, or barriers in the social and physical environment. Occupational therapists help people whose abilities have been reduced by illness, injury, developmental disorders, emotional or psychological disorders or the aging process.

They develop individual and group programs to promote, develop, restore and maintain participation in all aspects of a person's life. In particular, they help people care for themselves, return to work and resume community activities.

#### Main Roles

Occupational therapists help individuals, groups and communities to develop ways and opportunities to identify, participate in and improve their function in all aspects of life. In general, this involves:

- evaluating each client's level of functioning in areas of self-care, work, study, volunteerism and leisure
- developing intervention programs
- monitoring client progress, evaluating outcomes, and changing programs, as needed
- making recommendations (as an independent consultant or in conjunction with a multidisciplinary team of professionals) regarding client discharge, home or school management, transfer to alternate programs, integration into the community or return to work.

Intervention programs may include:

- changes that make environments more accessible and participation in activities easier for clients
- the use of meaningful activities that help clients restore or maintain function and prevent disability
- the use of assistive technology to enable participation in occupations
- vocational assessment and retraining to develop or improve work related skills
- self-help strategies that train or retrain clients in daily living activities
- health promotion and disability prevention strategies
- group interventions that facilitate social adjustment, alleviate stress through self-management techniques, and promote client well-being by providing lifestyle choices.

For example, occupational therapists may:

- help clients to learn new ways to perform daily chores, manage their finances, and shop for groceries
- help clients develop skills to cope with anxiety, drug or alcohol abuse, stress, decreased energy or normal aging
- work with parents, teachers and other professionals to help children have success at home, in school and in the community
- adapt environments in schools, homes, workplaces and communities to assist people in their day to day life (for example, by changing the layout of a home to make it more accessible or help prevent further injury)
- help clients regain the use of an injured body part or improve strength, endurance, movement and self-confidence
- use assistive technologies such as mobility devices and safety equipment to promote participation in meaningful activities.

Some occupational therapists specialize in working with a specific age group or clients who have a specific disability (for example, arthritis, mental health problems or spinal cord injuries).

Occupational therapists may also be required to supervise assistants.

Occupational therapists perform some or all of the following duties:

- assess clients' abilities and activity-related problems through administration of standardized measurement tools and tests, observations, and consultations with individuals who are closely associated with the client
- develop, implement, and evaluate individualized programs of therapy and make changes to therapy based on results of treatment and client consultations
- consult and advise on health promotion and preventative strategies
- educate the public and community interest groups on topics related to healthy participation in occupations
- may supervise support personnel and provide training.

### **Special Duties**

Occupational therapists may specialize in working with specific populations such as children or adults. They may also specialize in working with persons with individual problems such as dementia, traumatic brain injury, and chronic pain. They may also provide special interventions such as return-to-work programs.

### **Who is suited to become an Occupational Therapist?**

Occupational therapists are most effective when they have the following skills and characteristics:

- analytical skills and research interest
- critical thinking skills
- excellent problem solving skills
- good organizational skills
- good social skills
- the ability to communicate well in person and in writing
- the ability to work with little supervision
- creativity
- empathy.

They should enjoy working with people, finding innovative ways to deal with challenges, and taking a methodical approach to their work.

### **Who employs Occupational Therapists?**

Occupational therapists may work directly or work on a contract basis for:

- community agencies
- health care organizations such as hospitals, continuing care facilities, rehabilitation centres and clinics
- schools or post-secondary institutions
- government or insurance agencies
- professional organizations
- hospitals
- rehabilitation clinics
- day programs
- home-care programs
- self-employed
- government agency.

Occupational therapists usually work standard office hours. Some positions need evening and weekend work. In clinical settings, they may spend much of their working day standing, bending, and assisting patients. Lifting items that weigh up to 20 kilograms or more may be required in some employment settings.

Work in this field can be both physically and emotionally demanding, as it involves assisting individuals through rehabilitation. Therapists may need to be able to do considerable lifting, carrying, walking, standing, and crouching while performing their duties.

### **Salary**

Salary Range - \$51,936 - \$69,690

### **Required Training and Education to Become an Occupational therapist**

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) will grant academic accreditation only to occupational therapy programs that lead to a master's degree in occupational therapy. This means that all graduates will require a master's degree for entry into the profession.

Registration to practice in BC requires graduation from a college-approved program or demonstration that a program is equivalent to the degree earned in BC

Approved programs must include field work and be accredited by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists.

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is currently the only institution in the province that offers an approved program in occupational therapy. For more information, visit the UBC School of Rehabilitation Sciences website at: <http://www.rehab.ubc.ca>.

Occupational Therapists must be registered members of the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC) to legally practice in the province. The COTBC is the regulatory body that sets entry to practice requirements (establishing education qualifications; fieldwork requirements; entry level competencies and registration requirements). They set standards for

practice and ethical conduct. They also implement quality assurance programs. An example of a quality assurance program is continuing competence standards to assure continued safe, quality practice.

Workers already licensed or certified in another province or territory in a provincially regulated occupation will have their credentials recognized in BC

### **Career Advancement**

In hospital settings, most occupational therapists start at an occupational therapist grade I level. Advancement into managerial or administrative positions is possible with additional training and experience.

Opportunities to move into consultant positions or specializations within occupational therapy (i.e. quality assurance and research) are more and more becoming available.

Occupational therapists may also teach their profession in an educational setting.

### **Resources**

#### **Education Programs**

Programs listed are accredited by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT). Please contact the individual universities for more detailed information on entrance requirements, admission policies and program content.

University of British Columbia  
<http://osot.ubc.ca/prospective-students/admission-requirements-2/>

University of Alberta  
[www.ot.ualberta.ca](http://www.ot.ualberta.ca)

University of Manitoba  
[www.umanitoba.ca/medrehab/ot/index.html](http://www.umanitoba.ca/medrehab/ot/index.html)

University of Toronto  
[www.ot.utoronto.ca](http://www.ot.utoronto.ca)

University of Western Ontario  
[www.uwo.ca/fhs/ot](http://www.uwo.ca/fhs/ot)

McMaster University  
[www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/rehab](http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/rehab)

Queen's University  
[www.rehab.queensu.ca](http://www.rehab.queensu.ca)

University of Ottawa  
<http://http://www.health.uottawa.ca/sr/occthe/index.htm>

Université de Montréal  
<http://www.readap.umontreal.ca/>

McGill University  
[www.medicine.mcgill.ca/spot](http://www.medicine.mcgill.ca/spot)

Université Laval  
[www.ulaval.ca/sg/PR/C1/1.456.11.html](http://www.ulaval.ca/sg/PR/C1/1.456.11.html)

Université de Sherbrooke  
<http://www.usherbrooke.ca/premier-cycle/programmes/bac/sec/sante/ergotherapie/>

Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières  
[https://oraprdnt.uqtr.quebec.ca/pls/public/pgmw001?owa\\_cd\\_pgm=7096](https://oraprdnt.uqtr.quebec.ca/pls/public/pgmw001?owa_cd_pgm=7096)

Dalhousie University  
[www.occupationaltherapy.dal.ca](http://www.occupationaltherapy.dal.ca)

### **Financial assistance and bursaries**

For information about Canada student loans and grants, please visit:  
[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/learning/canada\\_student\\_loan/index.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/learning/canada_student_loan/index.shtml)

### **Associations**

Canada's Occupational Therapy Resource Site  
<http://www.otworks.ca>

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists  
<http://www.caot.ca>

College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia  
<http://www.cotbc.org>