

Occupational Therapist



“Some people think I specialize in getting people jobs. What I really do is help ill or injured patients recover the skills they need to lead independent, productive, and satisfying lives.”



- **Education needed:** Master's degree in occupational therapy
- **Salary range:** \$42,800 – \$98,100 annually
- **Related jobs:** Orthotist, physical therapist, prosthetist, rehabilitation engineer

Occupational Therapist

➤ What I do every day

I treat patients with spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and other conditions that limit their ability to use their arms and hands. I teach some patients to use special devices to feed themselves and perform other self-care activities. This might include brushing their teeth or combing their hair. I teach other patients to operate computer-aided equipment that assists them in turning lights on or off, dialing a telephone, or playing the radio. My goal is to help patients improve their physical and mental skills so they can compensate for lost functions.

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➤ The best part of my job

I get the chance to help someone every day, and that is very rewarding. I couldn't work in a job that didn't have close, personal contact with people. I feel great when I help an amputee learn to eat using an artificial arm.

➤ The worst part of my job

Parents of injured children can be unrealistic about their child's potential. I feel like the bad guy when I have to explain to parents that their child may never be able to hold a spoon or comb his or her own hair again.

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➤ What I need to know and be able to do

Occupational therapists (OTs) need a background in anatomy. They especially need to know about muscles and joints. They must keep up to date about the devices and technology that are available to benefit patients. OTs need patience and strong interpersonal skills because they work closely with patients, families, and the health care team. They should be able to inspire trust and motivation in their patients. They need to be able to demonstrate ingenuity and imagination when developing self-help activities.

➤ How I prepared to be an occupational therapist

Volunteering in the occupational therapy department of a rehabilitation hospital during high school was the best experience I could have had. The OTs let me watch some of the treatment sessions, and my volunteer

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experience looked good on my college application. After I graduated from high school, I entered an accredited bachelor's degree program in OT. In my senior year, I completed six months of supervised fieldwork. After graduation, I passed a national certification exam to become a registered OT.

➤ How I could have prepared better

I wish I had taken more courses in rehabilitation engineering because new computerized equipment is being developed all the time. My knowledge of this new technology is limited.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

↑ CAREER
LAUNCHER

Occupational Therapist

English
Skill Check

► Skill Check 1

USE
AGAIN

As an occupational therapist, you often must explain hemiplegia to patients and their families. An explanation of hemiplegia is shown in the box.

Hemiplegia: Hemiplegia refers to paralysis of one side of the body. Complete hemiplegia means that both the arm and the leg on the same side are paralyzed, as well as half of the face and tongue. Hemiplegia results from damage to the brain or nerves and is usually permanent.

Choose two classmates to play the roles as mother and father of Melissa, an 18-year-old girl who is hemiplegic as a result of an automobile accident. The parents don't understand why their daughter cannot use her left side. Using the conversation shown below, explain Melissa's condition to her mother and father. When you finish, answer the questions.

(continued)

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

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English
Skill Check

► Skill Check 1

(continued)

Conversation

OT: Mr. and Mrs. Jones, I'm _____, your daughter's occupational therapist.

Mother: Nice to meet you. I understand you've just started working with Melissa.

OT: That's right. I've evaluated her and I see her for therapy twice a day. I will continue this treatment.

Father: She doesn't seem able to move her left arm or leg. What's wrong?

OT: Your daughter has a disorder called hemiplegia, which is the medical term for paralysis on one side of the body. When she was injured in the automobile accident, the part of her brain that controls the movement on the left side of her body was damaged.

Mother: It will go away, won't it?

OT: Usually the paralysis is permanent, although people can learn to compensate for the hemiplegia.

1. What manner and tone of voice did you use with the parents? _____

2. What body language did you use? _____
3. Write one additional question you believe the parents might ask and the answer you would give.

Question: _____

Answer: _____

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English
Skill Check

► Skill Check 2

After completing a session with a client and meeting with the family, you write notes in the client's medical record. You describe the treatment, the client's response, and your conversation with the family. Like other medical professionals, you use the SOAP formula described on the next page to document the results of treatment.

Read through the parts of the SOAP formula. Using the examples as a guide, write a SOAP note describing the conversation you had with Mr. and Mrs. Jones about Melissa in English Skill Check 1.

(continued)

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

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English
Skill Check

► Skill Check 2

(continued)

The SOAP Formula

Many medical professionals document the results of treatment by describing it in the four ways listed below.

S Subjective The therapist records the client's feelings and symptoms, often in the client's own words.

Example: Juan's family was tearful and upset about his condition.

O Objective The therapist records facts about the session and what he or she observed.

Example: Juan's family listened to my explanation of spinal cord injury and asked several questions.

A Assessment The therapist uses what he or she recorded about the client's feelings and behavior to talk about what the client's problem is.

Example: The family understands Juan's condition and will be active in the rehabilitation program.

P Plan The therapist describes how the problem will be managed. This description usually includes the type of treatment and how often the client will receive therapy.

Example: Another family conference will be held in 6 weeks to discuss Juan's progress.

S: The family is confused about Melissa's condition.

O: _____

A: _____

P: _____

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Science
Skill Check

► Skill Check 1

As an occupational therapist, you must be familiar with many terms that relate to the work you do. Match each term below with the correct definition. You may use a dictionary or the Internet for assistance.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| _____ extremity | a. An arm or a leg |
| _____ upper extremity | b. An arm |
| _____ prosthesis | c. Bending |
| _____ extension | d. Lying on your back |
| _____ prone | e. An artificial limb |
| _____ supine | f. Straightening |
| _____ tendon | g. Lying on your stomach |
| _____ fascia | h. Tissue connecting bones together at joints |
| _____ ligament | i. Tissue that attaches muscles to bones |
| _____ flexion | j. Layers of superficial and deep connective tissue |

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

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Science
Skill Check

► Skill Check 2

You sometimes work with patients who have had amputations of one or both arms because of severe injuries or life-threatening diseases such as gangrene. Exactly where the arm is amputated depends on the patient's physical condition. There are several levels of amputation for the upper extremities.

The list below gives four levels of amputation. Label these four levels of amputation on the drawing.

Levels of amputation

- Wrist amputation
- Below-elbow amputation
- Above-elbow amputation
- Shoulder amputation

