

# Occupational Therapy

**Includes:**

- Occupational therapist
- Occupational therapy assistant

## Occupational Therapist

The practice of occupational therapy means the therapeutic use of everyday life activities (occupations) with clients (individuals, organizations, or populations) for the purpose of participation in roles and situations in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings. Occupational therapy services are provided for the purpose of promoting health and wellness and to those who have or are at risk for developing an illness, injury, disease, disorder, condition, impairment, disability, activity limitation, or participation restriction. Occupational therapy addresses the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory, and other aspects of performance in a variety of contexts to support engagement in everyday life activities that affect health, well-being, and quality of life.



### Career Description

Occupational therapy services are based on evaluation and assessment methods, including the use of skilled observation and the administration and interpretation of standardized or nonstandardized tests and measurements to identify areas for occupational therapy services.

The practice of occupational therapy includes:

- A. Methods or strategies selected to direct the process of interventions, such as:
  1. Establishing, remediating, or restoring a skill or ability that has not yet developed or is impaired.
  2. Compensating, modifying, or adapting activity or environment to enhance performance.
  3. Maintaining and enhancing capabilities without which performance in everyday life activities would decline.
  4. Health promotion and wellness to enable or enhance performance in everyday life activities.
  5. Preventing barriers to performance, including disabilities.
- B. Evaluation of factors affecting activities of daily living (ADL), instrumental activities of daily living (IADL), education, work, play, leisure, and social participation, including:
  1. Client factors, including body functions (such as neuromuscular, sensory, visual, perceptual, cognitive) and body structures (such as cardiovascular, digestive, integumentary, and genitourinary systems).
  2. Habits, routines, roles, and behavior patterns.
  3. Cultural, physical, environmental, social, and spiritual contexts and activity demands that affect performance.
  4. Performance skills, including motor, process, and communication/interaction skills.
- C. Interventions and procedures to promote or enhance safety and performance in activities of daily living (ADL), instrumental activities of daily living (IADL), education, work, play, leisure, and social participation, including:
  1. Therapeutic use of occupations, exercises, and activities.
  2. Training in self-care, self-management, home management, and community/work reintegration.

3. Development, remediation, or compensation of physical, cognitive, neuromuscular, sensory functions and behavioral skills.
4. Therapeutic use of self, including one's personality, insights, perceptions, and judgments, as part of the therapeutic process.
5. Education and training of individuals, including family members, caregivers, and others.
6. Care coordination, case management, and transition services.
7. Consultative services to groups, programs, organizations, or communities.
8. Modification of environments (home, work, school, or community) and adaptation of processes, including the application of ergonomic principles.
9. Assessment, design, fabrication, application, fitting, and training in assistive technology, adaptive devices, and orthotic devices, and training in the use of prosthetic devices.
10. Assessment, recommendation, and training in techniques to enhance functional mobility, including wheelchair management.
11. Driver rehabilitation and community mobility.
12. Management of feeding, eating, and swallowing to enable eating and feeding performance.
13. Application of physical agent modalities, and use of a range of specific therapeutic procedures (such as wound care management; techniques to enhance sensory, perceptual, and cognitive processing; and manual therapy techniques) to enhance performance skills.



### Employment Characteristics

The wide range of clients (individuals, organizations, and populations) served by occupational therapists is located in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care facilities, extended care facilities, private practices, schools, camps, the clients' own homes, and community agencies. Occupational therapists both receive referrals from and make referrals to the appropriate health, educational, or medical specialists.



### Salary

AOTA studies conducted in 2006 indicate that the average entry-level salary for occupational therapists is \$46,334. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see [www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary).



### Educational Programs

**Length.** Programs at the combined baccalaureate/master's level entail 4 to 5 years of college or university preparation.

Postbaccalaureate programs leading to a master's degree are generally 2 to 2 ½ years and programs leading to a doctoral degree are generally 2 to 3 years. Following completion of all educational requirements, individuals take a national certification examination. All states also regulate the practice of occupational therapy.

**Prerequisites.** Prerequisites vary among programs. A baccalaureate degree is a prerequisite for most master's and doctoral level

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occupational therapy programs. A strong foundation of liberal arts and biological, physical, social, and behavioral sciences may be prerequisite to, or concurrent with, the professional education of the program curriculum.

**Curriculum.** Curricula of accredited occupational therapy programs are required to include a broad foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, basic tenets of occupational therapy, occupational therapy theoretical perspectives, the process of screening and evaluation, the process of formulation and implementation of an intervention plan, context of service delivery, management of occupational therapy services, use of research, professional ethics, values, and responsibilities, and 24 weeks of fieldwork education. Doctoral-level programs have additional experiential requirements.



### Licensure, Registration, Certification

All states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the District of Columbia regulate the practice of occupational therapy. To obtain a license, applicants must graduate

from an accredited educational program and pass a national certification examination. Those who pass the exam are awarded the title "Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR)." Some states have additional requirements for therapists who work in schools or early intervention programs. These requirements may include education-related classes, an education practice certificate, or early intervention certification requirements.

## Occupational Therapy Assistant

Under the supervision of and in collaboration with an occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant provides services to clients focusing on participation in selected activities to restore, reinforce, and enhance performance; facilitate learning of those skills and functions essential for adaptation and participation; diminish or correct pathology; and promote and maintain health and wellness. A fundamental concern is the development and maintenance of the skill and capacity throughout the lifespan to perform with satisfaction to self and others meaningful tasks and roles essential to social participation and to the mastery of self and the environment. Under the supervision of and in partnership with the occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant participates in the development of adaptive skills and performance capacity and is concerned with factors that promote, influence, or enhance performance, as well as those that serve as barriers or impediments to the individual's occupational performance. The occupational therapy assistant provides service to those clients whose abilities to perform meaningful activities of living are threatened or impaired by:

- Developmental deficits
- The aging process
- Poverty and cultural differences
- Physical injury or illness
- Psychological or social disability



### Career Description

A contemporary entry-level occupational therapy assistant must:

- Have acquired an educational foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, including a focus on issues related to diversity
- Be educated as a generalist, with a broad exposure to the delivery models and systems utilized in settings where occupational

therapy is currently practiced and where it is emerging as a service

- Have achieved entry-level competence through a combination of academic and fieldwork education
- Be prepared to work under the supervision of and in cooperation with the occupational therapist
- Be prepared to articulate and apply occupational therapy principles, intervention approaches and rationales, and expected outcomes as these relate to occupational performance of the client
- Be prepared to be a lifelong learner and keep current with best practice
- Uphold the ethical standards, values, and attitudes of the occupational therapy profession



### Employment Characteristics

Occupational therapy assistants assist in the planning and implementation of treatment of a diverse population in a variety of settings, such as nursing homes, hospitals and clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care facilities, extended care facilities, sheltered workshops, schools and camps, private homes, and community agencies.



### Salary

AOTA studies conducted in 2006 indicate that the average entry-level salary for occupational therapy assistants is approximately \$33,000. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see [www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary).



### Educational Programs

**Length.** Education may be acquired in either a 2-year associate degree program or a 1- to 2-year certificate program. These technical-level education programs are located in 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities, and postsecondary vocational/technical schools and institutions and include academic and fieldwork components, as do the professional level programs. Following completion of all educational requirements, individuals take a national certification examination. Many states also regulate the practice of occupational therapy assistants.

**Prerequisites.** High school diploma or equivalent. A foundation of liberal arts and biological, physical, social, and behavioral sciences may be prerequisite to, or concurrent with, the technical education of the program curriculum.

**Curriculum.** Curricula of accredited occupational therapy assistant programs are required to include a broad foundation of the liberal arts and sciences, basic tenets of occupational therapy, the process of screening and evaluation, the process of intervention and implementation, context of service delivery, assistance in the management of occupational therapy services, use of professional literature, professional ethics, values, and responsibilities, and 16 weeks of fieldwork education.



### Inquiries

#### Careers Education

American Occupational Therapy Association  
4720 Montgomery Lane  
PO Box 31220  
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220  
301 652-2682  
[www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)

**Certification**

National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT)  
800 S Frederick Avenue, Suite 200  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877-4150  
301 990-7979  
[www.nbcot.org](http://www.nbcot.org)

**Program Accreditation**

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education  
4720 Montgomery Lane, PO Box 31220  
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220  
301 652-2682  
301 652-1417 Fax  
[www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)