

Occupational Therapy and Cerebral Palsy

What is occupational therapy?

Life is made up of meaningful everyday activities or occupations, such as walking the dog, gardening, preparing a meal, painting, doing the laundry and playing games. Occupations are part of life; they describe who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Occupations help bring meaning to life.

When we cannot participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disability or social and environmental circumstances, occupational therapists help find solutions to address the meaningful everyday activities of life. Occupational therapy also helps prevent disability or illness and enhances the way we participate in our communities and lives. Occupational therapy helps us engage in the occupation of living.



What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a broad term used to describe a group of chronic disorders affecting body movement and muscle coordination. This appears in the first few years of life and generally does not worsen over time; it is non-progressive. The effect of cerebral palsy can vary from individual to individual. Some people may appear to have no obvious effects while others may be non-speaking, use mobility devices or require assistance with activities of daily living.

According to Statistics Canada, over 40,000 Canadians are currently living with cerebral palsy. CP affects 1 in 500 to 1 in 1000 newborns each year. It is estimated that the long term care cost associated with cerebral palsy is \$921,000 per person, including indirect and direct medical costs and direct non-medical costs.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists help clients, families and organizations (such as schools and employers) understand the effects of cerebral palsy on day-to-day function. The occupational therapist works with clients to develop ways to compensate for any perceived limitations and enhance independence. Having an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the person, occupation, and environment can uniquely position occupational therapists to provide client centred, evidence-based services.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Assess skills, interests, values, and strengths in order to help identify an appropriate career path
- Facilitate opportunities for independence and personal control while supporting self-esteem
- Address barriers to participation in active and healthy occupations by advocating for safe and accessible environments that support occupations for all Canadians
- Help maintain social connectedness, adapt to and manage health/ability challenges as they arise
- Help engage in occupations that allow self-expression, opportunities to learn, and promote feelings of belonging and contributing
- Advocate for access to, and funding for, all aspects of the assistive technology acquisition process, including assessment, purchasing, training in device-use and follow-up, across all sectors and regions of Canadian society

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places, such as long term care facilities, community support services, family health teams, hospitals and clients' homes. Occupational therapists also work with organizations, such as government, policy makers, care providers and community agencies to develop programs and resources.

Occupational therapy works!

Elisha was born with cerebral palsy. She can't walk well or easily do things that need fine motor coordination. Her boyfriend is just finishing college and they would like to find a place, move in together and, eventually, start a family. Elisha has been a little nervous about how they will manage, especially the more intimate stuff. Her family suggested speaking with an occupational therapist. Elisha's occupational therapist is working with the couple figure out the practicalities, ensuring that their new home is as accessible as it can be. Most importantly to Elisha and her boyfriend, the occupational therapist is helping anticipate any challenges the couple may face in raising children. Elisha is so excited to think about starting a family. Because of occupational therapy, she can be a mom.

