

Occupational Therapy and Spinal Cord Injury

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 can't participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disabilities 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 Spinal Cord Injury?

Spinal cord injuries affect the spinal cord's ability to send and receive messages from the brain which results in a loss of function and sensation. Spinal Cord Injuries can occur following a traumatic event or be the consequences of a disease. Spinal Cord Injury Canada reported that 51% of current spinal cord injuries result from accident, while 49% are caused by disease.

Spinal Cord Injury Canada estimates that there are over 86,000 people living with spinal cord injury in Canada with 4,300 new cases each year. The annual cost of spinal cord trauma in Canada is approximately \$3.6 billion of which \$1.8 billion are direct health care costs.

How Do Occupational Therapists Help?

Occupational therapists assess physical and cognitive function and provide skills training for activities of daily living from self-care to getting around your home and community. Occupational therapists can suggest equipment and assistive technologies to compensate for impaired motor function. Occupational therapists strive to support individuals to realise their potential by enabling them to participate in and contribute to society. Occupational therapists also provide strategies and support for families and caregivers.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Address goals related activities of daily living such as self-care, work, and leisure
- Assess individual needs for equipment and assistive devices
- Recommend home modifications and adaptive equipment
- Assist and navigate the system to obtain funding for equipment and services and help ensure that all of the client's needs are met
- Provide psychosocial support to help the client adapt to their new abilities and lifestyle
- Educate client regarding self-care and exercise to help minimize secondary complications
- Teach family members and caregivers to help minimize their risk of injury, manage caregiver stress, and to find balance in life

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!

Scott injured his spinal cord 25 years ago in a motor-vehicle accident when he was 23 years old. He has very little movement below the neck. Very early in his recovery, Scott was connected to occupational therapists that helped him to set goals and work toward them. His occupational therapist has helped him to figure out how to run his new Internet devices using a voice recognition system to control the computer and telephone. Together, they identified home modifications so that he can be more independent, and the occupational therapist supported him in taking up leisure activities. Scott has taken up sailing in a specially adapted boat, something he never thought possible after his injury. Scott lives a very satisfying life and believes his life is more fulfilling now than before the accident. Because of occupational therapy, Scott continues to seek new challenges in his life.

