What Is an Occupational Therapist?

Occupational Therapists

Occupational therapists are experts in the effect that illness and injury have on normal human development and musculoskeletal function. Occupational therapists work with patients or clients in hospitals, in nursing homes, in outpatient clinics, or in the home.

What They Do

Occupational therapists help patients with orthopedic problems, especially those of the upper extremity, to reduce pain and regain function. They assist patients recovering from a stroke in learning to use their limbs and walk again. Occupational therapists also direct programs that assess patients' physical performance or living environments to determine areas that can benefit from adaptive strategies.

Education

All occupational therapists are college graduates, and most are required to be licensed by the state in which they practice.

Common Problems

A variety of problems can be addressed by occupational therapists. These include:

- Arthritis
- Shoulder, arm, wrist, or hand problems
- Hip fractures or other fractures
- Vision or cognitive problems affecting the ability to drive

- Cardiovascular disease
- Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's disease
- Stroke
- Amputations

Professional Services

- Customized treatment programs aimed at improving abilities to carry out activities of daily living (eating, dressing, bathing, ambulating, and toileting)

- Comprehensive evaluation of the home with recommendations for restorative or safety adaptations

- Assessments and treatment for performance skills such as driving, cooking, bathing, and so forth

- Recommendations and training in the use of adaptive equipment

- Guidance to family members and caregivers in safe and effective methods of caring for individuals

Coverage

Most forms of occupational therapy treatment are covered by your insurance, but the coverage will vary with each plan.

Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Your physician should be consulted for personalized information.