

Healthcare Practitioners and Technicians

Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapists work with individuals who have a mental, physical, developmental, or emotional disability to help develop, recover, or maintain their ability to perform tasks at work and activities of daily living (dressing, grooming, personal hygiene, cooking, cleaning, and transportation). For instance, people may need to work with an occupational therapist due to spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, and permanent deficits from strokes.

An occupational therapist has several jobs which include:

- Assisting patients in improving their motor function and by prescribing physical exercise and stretching to increase strength and dexterity.
- Demonstrating how to use adaptive equipment such as wheelchairs, orthoses (which are braces and splints), and eating and dressing aids to patients with permanent disabilities that affect various areas of physical function.
- Performing assessments of a patient's ability to function in certain work environments. The therapist will often go to the patient's place of employment and determine what that person will need in order to function at work.
- Helping those who are mentally or developmentally challenged by teaching them time management, budgeting, shopping, and homemaking skills. They teach their patients how to use public transportation and other ways to cope with daily life.

Occupational therapists can specialize in working with a certain population, such as children. Those who work with children typically work in schools and provide in-school therapy and modified classroom equipment. Some may provide early intervention treatment to infants and toddlers. Early intervention treatment aims at treating infants and toddlers at risk for developing a disability early so as to slow or eliminate development of the disability.

Occupational therapists spend a moderate amount of time working on their feet. Those working for a single employer often work 40 hours per week. Therapists can also work part time for multiple employers at different locations which often requires traveling between facilities. A significant amount of traveling is required for those who do home care, which is when a therapist travels and provides therapy to a patient in their home.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

To become an occupational therapist a master's or doctoral level degree needs to be obtained from a program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Paid or volunteer experience in a healthcare setting, especially involving occupational therapy is looked upon favorably, and often required, as a prerequisite to admission to most occupational therapy programs. Coursework in occupational therapy programs comprises 2-3 years of study depending on the program and includes physical, biological, and behavioral sciences, and at least 24 weeks of fieldwork. Fieldwork is where an occupational therapy student works as an occupational therapist while being supervised by a licensed occupational therapist.

To be licensed as an occupational therapist in New York State one must:

- Be a graduate from an accredited ACOTE program,
- Complete all fieldwork requirements,
- Pass the national certification exam.
- Be at least 21 years of age,

Occupational therapists are required to re-certify every three years. Requirements for re-certification include 36 professional developmental units (PDUs, or continuing education units).

The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (NBCOT) is a not-for-profit credentialing agency that provides certification for the occupational therapy profession after graduation from an accredited occupational therapist program. They provide the Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR) and Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) certification examinations.

More Information on Licensing and Certification:

- American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA):
<http://www.aota.org/default.aspx>
- New York State License: <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/ot/>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree or doctorate earned at an accredited public university in occupational therapy costs an average of \$14,900* per year. Completion time is generally two years to four years.

Occupational Therapy Registered (OTR) Exam: \$480-520, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

Licensure occurs at the state level: Costs vary by state and range from \$60 - 300. The cost of licensure in New York State Licensing is \$294, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

New York State Limited Permit: \$70

The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy Examination Application Fee \$520

Costs associated with continuing education vary

* Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.