Occupational therapy
Helping people to live life their way

Occupational therapists are health and social care professionals who help people of all ages – babies, children, adults and older people – to carry out activities (or occupations) they need, want, or are expected to do, but are prevented from doing so as a result of physical or mental illness, disability, or as a result of changes in their lives as they get older.

Occupational therapists can suggest alternative ways of doing activities, providing advice on learning new approaches, helping people to get the most from life. For example, an occupational therapist can help people with the following activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-care:</th>
<th>Getting dressed, using the toilet, preparing and eating meals.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productivity:</td>
<td>Going to or remaining in work, volunteering, studying, or caring for others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure:</td>
<td>Playing sports, shopping with friends, or doing hobbies.</td>
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How to find an occupational therapist
Ask your GP, nurse, social worker or other health or social care professional to refer you to an occupational therapist.

You can self-refer to a social services occupational therapist by contacting your local council* to arrange an appointment.

To arrange a private consultation with an independent occupational therapist, who will charge you a fee, please visit www.cotss-ip.org.uk to find a local independent occupational therapist.

*Social work departments in Scotland
*Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland

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Helping your child develop and thrive
It is important for babies, infants, children and young people
to grow, learn, have fun, socialise and play so they can
develop, thrive and reach their full potential.

What is occupational therapy?
Occupational therapy enables people to participate in
daily life to improve their health and wellbeing. Daily life is
made up of many activities (or occupations). Occupations
for children or young people may include self-care (getting
ready to go out, eating a meal, using the toilet), being
productive (going to nursery or school, or volunteering), and
leisure (playing with friends or doing hobbies).

Who do occupational therapists help?
Occupational therapists help babies, children and young
people who may need support and advice if they are not
able to do occupations due to illness, disability, family
circumstances, or as a result of changes in their lives as they
get older.

How occupational therapy can help
An occupational therapist will need to identify and
understand your child’s usual occupations to discover
what difficulties they face. They will support you and
other relevant people such as teachers, to evaluate your
child’s challenges and strengths to help them to do those
occupations that are important to you and your child. The
occupational therapist may suggest alternative ways of
doing things, providing advice on learning new approaches
and techniques, or making changes to the environment, for
example, through using equipment or adaptations.

If your child is experiencing difficulties
doing things, occupational therapy can help. Some examples are listed below:

Self-care
As children and young people develop, looking after
themselves becomes increasingly important, so they
make a successful transition into adulthood.
An occupational therapist will work with the family of
a baby or infant to help establish a routine and develop
suitable techniques for occupations such as sleeping,
feeding and bathing. As the child becomes older, an
occupational therapist will help the child to develop skills
and techniques for everyday activities such as dressing, using
the toilet, or participating in mealtimes. In their teenage
years, the occupational therapist will focus on supporting
the young person to look after themselves so they can
participate in school, college, work or leisure activities.

Education
Learning and being productive is vital for children and
young people; it gives them a sense of purpose and
opens up opportunities.
An occupational therapist will recommend ways to position
a baby and suggest activities so they can experience new
things and learn whilst playing. As the child reaches school
age, an occupational therapist will work with school staff
to develop a child’s skills or recommend changes to the
environment so they can successfully participate in the
classroom, such as using scissors, cutting and pasting, or
drawing. As the child gets older, an occupational therapist
will explore techniques with teaching staff so the young
person can reach their potential in the classroom.

Play and leisure
Having fun is extremely important for children and
young people; it is through play and leisure that
learning happens and friendships are formed.
An occupational therapist will support parents to help their
baby succeed through play. When the child gets older, an
occupational therapist can assist the child to make friends
and play at home, school and in the community. For the
young person, an occupational therapist will support them
to develop interests, socialise, and take part in hobbies.

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