

Occupational Therapy and Workplace Health and Well-Being

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, 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.



Why is Workplace Health and Well-Being important?

Workplace health and wellness programs are an important business strategy. Not only are they essential for improving employee health and productivity, but they also reflect a business' reputation as a socially responsible employer. Workplace health and wellness programs attract new talent, and help retain and engage current employees.

Workers who experience injuries and illness are frequently away from their employment longer than necessary or are not performing to their optimal ability. Some workers never return to work even though they could be productive with changes in job tasks, equipment or workspace. Health Canada estimates that health-care spending represents \$23.9 billion in the private sector.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists recognize that the health of the employee and the work environment are determined by a range of interacting factors. The choice, performance, organization and satisfaction in occupations are influenced by the relationship between people and their environment. Occupational therapists offer solutions to common workplace issues.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Work with employers and employees to understand what goals and activities are important to the individual and the company.
- Assess the individual employee's level of ability related to job demands. Abilities may be compromised by a variety of factors such as pain, endurance, depression, fear, family/supervisor support, ergonomics, timing, finances etc.
- Evaluate the person, the environment and the occupation and consider the interrelationship between all three.
- Provide individual or group programming on a variety of techniques such as pain management, work hardening, energy conservation and relaxation.
- Work with employees who have experienced illness or injury and their employers to develop a daily schedule of graded, meaningful activities that may reduce the risk of (re)injury, increase physical fitness, reduce fear, improve sleep and detract from negative thoughts.
- Encourage clients to track progress.
- Adapt/modify client's home and working environments to minimize the risk of injury and pain.

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places such as communities, schools, workplaces, hospitals, private practices, residential homes and prisons.

Occupational therapy works!

Julia wrenched her back while at work. She loved her job but after eight months was still experiencing considerable pain. She had been taking time off work because the pain was so unbearable some days. Julia became scared to do activities because she didn't want to make the pain worse. When her friends called to invite her out she didn't even answer the phone. Some days it was a struggle to get out of bed and friends and colleagues were concerned about her mood change. Julia's occupational therapist helped her develop the skills and strategies to overcome her troubling issues. Julia was able to get back to her job and the occupation of living.

