

Taking Care: What does occupational therapy do?

If you or a loved one has suffered from an injury or illness that restricts the ability to accomplish around-the-home activities, therapy might be an option for you. Occupational therapy helps patients retain or regain fine motor skills needed to perform important activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, and eating.

Occupational therapy is used to help increase functional independence in patients who have suffered a loss or decrease in daily life skills due to disease, illness, condition, or aging. Some conditions which may benefit from occupational therapy include: Alzheimer's disease, hip fractures or replacements, Parkinson's disease, physical injuries, stroke, and conditions related to aging, such as muscle loss and decreased mobility. Patients may be referred to an occupational therapist through their primary care physician. The occupational therapist works with patients in a variety of settings, including acute care hospitals, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities, outpatient clinics, and in a patient's home. The therapist works with the patient to develop creative solutions for accomplishing tasks. Occupational therapists also make recommendations for adaptations to the home to allow the patient to maintain their independence while living safely in their own home.

It is important to understand how occupational therapy might be a better fit for the patient than physical therapy. Although physical therapy may help a patient regain the strength needed to perform daily tasks, it is occupational therapy that will specifically teach how to do the task. For example, after a major illness or injury, a patient may have a limited range of motion or be left with only partial use of certain limbs. Occupational therapy will teach a patient how to adapt to their new body and work with their limitations to accomplish daily tasks and maintain independence. Anyone who experiences a loss in daily skills or decreased ability to perform daily tasks as the result of any illness, disease, or aging, may qualify for occupational therapy treatment with a recommendation from their physician. Occupational therapy is used for patients of all ages and health conditions.

If you are a senior who has Medicare Part B, then your benefit will cover the cost of occupational therapy. However, patients must be diagnosed with a condition warranting this therapy by their physician in order to qualify for Medicare coverage of the treatment. Most private insurance covers occupational therapy, although coverage differs between plans.

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