

What does occupational therapy consist of?

Occupational therapy is individualized based on your needs. How much time you spend in occupational therapy will depend on how much the stroke has affected you and what is most important to you for life and work after the stroke. When you meet with your OT for the first time, he or she will evaluate your capabilities, your environment, and your ability to participate in your daily activities. You will then develop a therapy plan to help you learn to perform these tasks. As your stroke recovery progresses and your capabilities improve, your OT will monitor your progress and help you periodically reevaluate your goals and the therapies needed to reach them.

The paralysis, weakness, and lack of coordination experienced by many stroke survivors can make performing even the simplest tasks extremely difficult. The initial goals of occupational therapy for most stroke survivors are learning to perform basic tasks: dressing yourself, grooming, bathing, and going to the bathroom. Your OT will help train you to perform these activities by helping you relearn the skills that were lost after the stroke. You may also need to develop new ways of doing things, either to get by while you recover or to cope with long-term limitations caused by the stroke.

Occupational therapy can also teach you mental strategies and organizational tips to help you manage complicated tasks at home or on the job, and prevent memory problems from interfering with your daily life. Adjusting to life after stroke can be a major change, and your OT can help you make the necessary adjustments to your daily routine, such as how you prepare your meals and leaving yourself reminders or detailed instructions.

Because stroke can affect your ability to walk and your balance, injuries caused by falls are a serious concern in stroke survivors, especially in older women. You may need to make modifications to your home to make it safer for you while remaining active. Modifications to your environment can also help make daily activities easier. Examples of changes an OT may recommend include placing handrails on stairs and grab bars in the bathroom, making sure your home is well lit, and removing small throw rugs.

For survivors who want to drive again after a stroke, an OT can help you identify and work on vision, thinking, and physical problems that might keep you from doing so safely, and refer you

to a driver rehabilitation program. In survivors who will not be able to drive safely again, your OT can help you explore other options for getting around in the community.

If you were working before your stroke and want to return after your recovery is underway, occupational therapy can help you to gradually transition back into the workplace. This will include working on your ability to perform physical and mental tasks related to your job, starting with part-time work until you are able to transition back to full time. Your OT can also help you work with your employer to set up changes to your job environment and make the transition easier for you. If you are unable to perform the job you had before because of your limitations after a stroke, your OT can help you find work that fits your interests and skills and is safely within your physical abilities.

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