
Returning to work following illness or injury

Returning to work following a complex injury or prolonged illness can be difficult. Occupational therapists help people return to work whose ability has been impaired by physical, emotional, or developmental illness or injury.

Matching the person to the work

Often the physical, cognitive, and emotional demands of work are high and going from not working at all to returning to full-time work is too much. An occupational therapist will help identify strength and challenge areas and may:

- Monitor or design a gradual return to work plan that modifies the hours worked and/or slowly increases the difficulty of the tasks performed. The individual's abilities and productivity then improve.
- Recommend modifying the tools used or the workstation setup to accommodate different abilities.
- Work with the employer to develop methods within the organization to improve the emotional demands of work (e.g. decrease stress or unbalanced workload) or work with the individual to increase healthy coping behaviours.
- Teach safe work habits such as correct sitting and standing postures or safe lifting practices.

Occupational Therapy's unique outlook on work

Success at work as the result of a good match between the job demands (physical, cognitive, emotional), the person (physical, cognitive, and emotional capacity), and the environment (workstation, tools, etc.). Occupational therapists are health professionals trained in

physical and mental health and are skilled in assessing people's abilities and the fit with work activities.

Occupational therapy helps bridge the gap between ability and the job demands.

When people are not able to return to work, occupational therapists help people return to work by:

- Improving ability in the person by improving physical ability, adapting habits or methods to accomplish work activities, and teaching health work behaviours (e.g. reducing stress, improving lifting technique, etc.)
- Adapting the work tasks to improve performance. This may be as simple as adjusting a computer work station to designing new ways to accomplish work tasks.
- Introducing specialized equipment where necessary. Adapted tools and equipment can accomplish a lot!
- Recommending alternate work that the person can do. Often employers need assistance in knowing what work a person with a temporary or permanent limitation can do. Occupational therapists can help.

(see over)

Occupational Therapy

Skills for the job of living.

Finding an occupational therapist to help at work

Occupational therapy services for work-related problems can be accessed through many methods, including:

- Worker's Compensation for a work-related injury
- Motor vehicle insurance
- Extended health benefits with some insurers
- Community agencies with specific purposes (e.g. a brain injury society or employment assistance for people with disabilities)
- Employers or clients purchasing services directly from an occupational therapist

To find an occupational therapist go to our website at www.saot.ca and download the Private Practice Listing. Or for an occupational therapist employed by a regional health authority, phone Health Link, or go to the Inform Alberta website (www.informalberta.ca).



Occupational therapy assists you with the Skills for the job of living in caring for yourself and your family, in returning to work, and in resuming community activities.

For additional information of the benefits of occupational therapy and how it can assist you or someone you know, please contact:

info@saot.ca

www.saot.ca or www.otworks.com