

# Occupational Therapy and Arthritis

## 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 cannot 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.



## What is arthritis and what is the impact?

Arthritis is one of Canada's most common chronic conditions. With over 100 different forms, arthritis can strike anyone at any time, regardless of age, physical condition, culture, gender, often with devastating and debilitating effects. People living with arthritis are burdened everyday with pain and disability, including joint pain, stiffness and swelling. There is no cure for arthritis only treatment.

The Arthritis Society of Canada estimates that over 4.6 million Canadian adults report having arthritis and by 2036, nearly one in five adults will suffer from it. The impact of arthritis on our economy in terms of healthcare cost and loss of productivity is currently estimated at \$33 billion a year and is expected to double within 15 years.

## How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists are trained to assess the whole person, and not just the physical aspects of the person's problem. Occupational therapists consider arthritis in terms of how it affects someone's function, their day to day living. Occupational therapists can provide strategies to help manage arthritis and maintain daily function.

## What do occupational therapists do?

- Evaluate and develop strategies to manage self-care, childcare, home management, work and leisure activities.
- Identify and schedule priorities in work, home and leisure to save time, energy and reduce fatigue.
- Suggest devices, postures and techniques to help decrease inflammation, deformity and maintain function for people with arthritis.
- Teach strategies to reduce joint stress, decrease daily pain and conserve energy.
- Advocate for clients for flexible work schedules and tasks with employers to allow to plan for changes in function that come with arthritis.

## Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places, such as long term care facilities, community support services, family health teams, hospitals and clients' homes. Occupational therapists also work with organizations, such as government, policy makers, care providers and community agencies to develop programs and resources.

## Occupational therapy works!

*Grace loves her job. She works as personal assistant and definitely needs the money as she is a single mom of two busy teenagers. She noticed recently that she has been tired, achy and in pain. She has not been able to keep up with her teenagers while doing usual family leisure activities. She was recently diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and it has been difficult to do everything she wants to do. Grace's family physicians suggested she speak with an occupational therapist. Her occupational therapist has helped by teaching Grace to pace herself, showed her joint protection techniques, talk to her employer to reorganize her workload and develop time saving techniques to ensure she is spending more time with her children. Grace was surprised at how much easier life is with just a few changes. Because of occupational therapy, Grace has a good work life balance.*

