

Occupational Therapy and Fall Prevention

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 Fall Prevention so important?

Falls are the most common preventable injury in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, 63% of seniors, 50% of adolescents and 35% of working-age adults have been injured by falls. Sports related activities are the main cause of injury by falls for adolescents. Older adults' falls often result from tripping, stumbling or walking or doing household chores.

Falls also represent the most common cause of injury hospitalization and are the leading cause of injuries resulting in permanent partial disability (47%) and total permanent disability (50%). Falls represent \$6.2 billion of total injury related costs in Canada in 2004. Falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths in Canada.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists approach fall prevention by addressing personal, environmental and behavioral factors which influence people's participation in activities at home and in the community. Occupational therapists work with other professionals to assess and help clients develop the skills needed to engage in healthy and meaningful lives, including preventative education.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Develop simple and elegant solutions to prevent falls, such as using sand on slippery surfaces, ensuring stability of railings and teaching clients how to walk with canes or other mobility devices.
- Adapt/modify client's home and working environments to minimize the risk of injury from falls.
- Work with employees who have experienced injury and their employers to develop a daily schedule of graded, meaningful activities that help to reduce the risk of (re)injury and increase physical fitness.
- Develop tools and resources that contribute to active living for all age groups.
- Provide recommendations and strategies to communities, stakeholders and decision makers to ensure safe and accessible public spaces.
- Help clients rebuild confidence in their daily lives after a fall.

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!

George was shoveling snow off his walkway, when he lost his footing on a slippery patch. George broke his hip and has been in hospital for several weeks. He is due for discharge but seems to have lost the confidence to manage on his own. He expressed concerns to his daughter about getting around his home, keeping up with the maintenance and ensuring that his home remains safe for himself and others. George's daughter suggested talking to an occupational therapist. The occupational therapist assessed George's ability to take care of himself and made suggestions to improve safety at home and also ensured that he can drive safely. George has been feeling more confident about his return home and is looking forward to meeting his friends at the coffee shop again. Because of occupational therapy, George will be okay.

