

JOB DESCRIPTION

Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTAs) work under the direction of an occupational therapist. OTAs use everyday activities (called occupations) in the areas of self-care, work, productive activities, play, etc., to help people of all ages prevent, lessen, or overcome physical and mental disabilities. Their goal is to assist people to live as independently as possible. OTAs help people develop and recover activities of daily living (ADLs), like getting dressed, driving, and working. OTAs may work with adults in their homes, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, community centers, and other facilities. They:

- Guide clients in therapeutic activities, such as exercises to improve motor skills and functional abilities
- Lead children who have disabilities in play activities that promote coordination, socialization, and meeting developmental milestones
- Teach clients new ways of accomplishing everyday tasks
- Instruct clients in the use of special equipment—for example, showing a client with Parkinson's disease how to use adaptive devices to simplify meal preparation
- Observe patients before, during, and after therapy, and document it
- Use knowledge of body systems for safe and effective rehabilitation and to promote health
- Collaborate with members of the health care team to improve patient outcomes
- Educate patients/family members about what to do after treatment

PAY

\$68,340 (\$32.86/hour) median annual wage in May 2024

JOB OUTLOOK

18% (Much faster than average) 2024-2034

EDUCATION/TRAINING

Associate degree programs typically last about two years and include coursework in anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology. Students also gain hands-on experience during supervised clinical work. Upon satisfactory completion of the program requirements, graduates are eligible to apply for certification by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) and licensure through the appropriate state agency. After successful completion of this exam, the individual will be a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA).

IMPORTANT SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

- **Adaptability/Creativity.** When a certain type of therapy is not meeting client goals, assistants may need to work creatively with occupational therapists in their approach. Those with creative personalities can find ways to turn tasks into games, which is especially important for OTAs who work with children, seniors, and disabled patients.
- **Compassion.** They must have empathy to help their patients who are frustrated by their challenges.
- **Detail-oriented.** Occupational therapist assistants should be organized, keep accurate records, and carefully follow written and verbal instructions given by the occupational therapist to ensure optimal care.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Occupational therapist assistants spend much of their time interacting with patients, their families, and other healthcare practitioners, and should enjoy working with people.
- **Physical stamina/strength.** Occupational therapist assistants are on their feet and moving as they work with patients. This includes kneeling, stooping, bending, and standing for long periods.

PHYSICAL THERAPY VS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



Physical Therapy deals specifically with physical disorders of the body and helps to restore weakened muscles and normal movement and decrease pain.



Occupational Therapy focuses on daily activities and interventions to help patients function more easily in their environment.



DEGREE PROGRAMS

CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (Cleveland Metropolitan Campus)

Associate of Applied Science degree in Occupational Therapy Assistant Technology

Coursework includes general education courses, occupational therapy theory and skill-building courses, and on-the-job experiences at various fieldwork sites. The Occupational Therapy Assistant Technology (OTAT) program is based at the Metropolitan Campus in Cleveland. A two-year full-time commitment is necessary to complete the program.

www.tri-c.edu/programs/health-careers/occupational-therapy/index.html

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY (Ashtabula and Liverpool Campus)

Associate of Applied Science degree in Occupational Therapy Assistant

The integrated curriculum includes lecture, labs, and fieldwork. The program is the only hybrid program in Ohio and is available both full-time and part-time.

www.kent.edu/cats/ota

LORAIN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE (Elyria)

Associate of Applied Science in Occupational Therapist Assistant

A 24-month program that includes a pre-admission semester. It includes 16 weeks of full-time fieldwork in two different settings at the end of the program. This fieldwork may occur in traditional and non-traditional practice settings. Three level-one experiences are required during the classroom portion of the program. Offered in partnership with the EHOVE Career Center.

www.lorainccc.edu/health/occupational-therapy/

STARK STATE COLLEGE (North Canton)

Associate of Applied Science Occupational Therapy Assistant

Runs five semesters in length. Most students take some or all of the required non-technical courses before starting the OTA sequence. The Occupational Therapy Assistant Program has limited enrollment. Students must apply and be accepted into the Program separately from being enrolled in the College.

www.starkstate.edu/academics/programs/occupational-therapy-assistant/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

www.aota.org/

OHIO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

www.oota.org/