

EXPLORING: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Overview

Occupational Therapists (OTs) treat patients with injuries, illnesses, or disabilities through the therapeutic use of everyday activities. They help these patients develop, recover and improve the skills needed for daily living and working.

Typical Duties

- ▶ Observe patient doing tasks, ask the patient questions, and review the patient's medical history
- ▶ Establish a treatment plan for patients, laying out the types of activities and specific goals to be accomplished
- ▶ Demonstrate exercises that can help relieve pain for people with chronic conditions
- ▶ Evaluate a patient's home or workplace and identify how it can be better suited to the patient's health needs
- ▶ Educate a patient's family and employer about how to accommodate and care for the patient
- ▶ Recommend special equipment, such as wheelchairs and eating aids, and instruct patients on how to use equipment

Key Information

- In 2021, the median salary for OTs: \$85,570 and employment of OTs is expected to grow 14% before 2031.
- Occupational therapists may also work in mental health settings where they help patients who suffer from developmental disabilities, mental illness, or emotional problems. They help these patients cope with and engage in daily life by teaching skills such as time management, budgeting, using public transportation, and doing household chores.
- Additionally, OTs may work with individuals who have problems with drug abuse, alcoholism, depression, or suffer from other disorders.

Education Programs

Occupational therapist entry-level degrees are either masters or doctoral degrees and practitioners are required to sit for the Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR) Exam administered by the NBCOT. However, it should be noted that the American Occupational Therapy Association has issued a statement that the profession should transition toward a doctoral-level single point of entry for occupational therapists, with a target completion date of 2025.

[The American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\)](#) provides lists of accredited occupational therapist degree programs.

Typical Application Timeline

Many OT programs have multiple deadline dates or operate on a rolling admissions process. Check each school individually to ensure timeline.

Admission Requirements: Knowledge & Strategies

Work with your faculty advisor to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's individual website for specific requirements! NOTE: Some schools may require additional coursework in sociology, anthropology, oral communications, lifespan development, physics and English. Check each program individually to ensure your coursework is acceptable!

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Typical Prerequisites Include:

- ▶ Biology with lab
- ▶ General Chemistry with lab
- ▶ Human Anatomy and Physiology with labs
- ▶ Statistics
- ▶ Medical Terminology
- ▶ Abnormal Psychology

Prepare for and take the Graduate Records Exam (GRE)

- ▶ It is recommended that you take the test at least one year before you want to go to occupational therapy school. Most of those who take the GRE do so after their third year of college. [Learn more about the GRE](#) on ETS's website.
- ▶ Content tested includes:
 - ▷ Verbal Reasoning — ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information
 - ▷ Quantitative Reasoning — basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data analysis
 - ▷ Analytical Writing — critical thinking and analytical writing skills

Admissions is based on holistic review, involving factors beyond GRE scores and GPA like:

- ▶ Exposure to occupational therapy: some OT programs may require OT observation hours or a signed verification form as part of the admissions process. It is recommended that you shadow pediatric and geriatric OT sessions
- ▶ Research experience
 - Leadership, involvement, employment
 - Volunteer experience

Additional Tips

- Perform strong academically. Many OT schools have GPA minimums for applicants, typically around a 3.0
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and professionals. Remember, such connections can open up opportunities for you and letters of recommendation will be required to apply.
- Some OT programs may require a letter of recommendation from a professional OT.
- When you submit an application, remember you will do so through a centralized application form: [Occupation Therapy Centralized Application Service \(OTCAS\)](#)
- Plan financially: there is a cost associated with taking the GRE and applying to schools

Want more information?

Schedule an appointment through [Handshake](#) to meet with a career coach, learn more and create plans to meet your goals!