# Occupational Therapy and Primary Health Care

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.
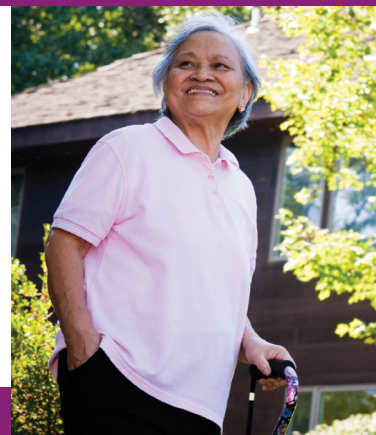
What is Primary Health Care?

Primary health care is usually the first place people go when they need health advice or care. Essentially, primary health care refers to an approach to health and a spectrum of services that includes all health services used in front lines by the population to address their health concerns. The goal of primary health care is to provide preventative services that extend beyond tradition health care.

According to the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, countries with a strong primary health care system have lower all-cause mortality, all-cause premature mortality and lower mortality rates from chronic diseases.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists use their expertise and full scope of practice to improve client health and participation in daily activities. Occupational therapists act as primary care practitioners or health promotion experts, providing case management, chronic disease management, injury prevention techniques and caregiver education, for example. Their intervention can also focus on a health crisis or to prevent hospitalizations, shorten hospital stays and provide community or caregiver support.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Collaborate with interprofessional health care teams to provide a holistic assessment of a client's needs
- Promote health and prevent illness and injury through health promotion and health literacy
- Teach and support family members and caregivers to help minimize their risk of injury, manage caregiver stress, and to find balance in life
- Address the current gaps and challenges in health care in Canada and provide solutions for changing health service needs
- Develop and advocate for transformative change in the current health care model to meet the current needs of the Canadian population

Where do occupational therapists work?

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

Occupational therapy works!

My mother was having difficulty moving around her house and in the community. Our family could see that it was starting to impact how she was able to manage in her home and she stopped walking to the coffee shop down the road. Although she never told us about falling, we saw her stumble a few times and she was becoming more unsteady on her feet. We started to worry so she agreed to go with me to the doctor to see if there was anything we could do to maintain her health and independence. Our doctor recommended that we see the occupational therapist on her Family Health Team for injury and falls prevention intervention. Our occupational therapist consulted with the team pharmacist who reviewed my mother's medications. The occupational therapist also came to her home and made recommendations for equipment to make things easier and to help keep her safe in her home and suggested simple strength and balance exercises. Because of occupational therapy, my mother feels safer at home and our family worries a lot less!

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