

# Occupational Therapy and Stroke

## 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 a stroke?

A stroke is a sudden injury to part of the brain caused when blood flow in an artery stops. Stroke deprives areas of the brain of oxygen and nutrients, which damage functions and abilities. Stroke remains a serious health issue that can affect Canadian and their loved ones of all ages.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada there are an estimated 50,000 people who sustain a stroke in Canada every year, or one every ten minutes. Stroke is the third leading cause of death in Canada. Conference Board of Canada estimates that heart disease and stroke costs the Canadian economy more than \$20.9 billion every year in medical and hospital costs as well as a loss in wages and productivity.

## How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapy is a client-centered profession that uses meaningful activities across the spectrum of physical and mental domains to reduce limitations after stroke. Occupational therapists help stroke survivors through all aspects of rehabilitation, including prevention, assessment and interventions. Occupational therapy focused on improving personal activities of daily living after stroke can improve performance and reduce the risk of deterioration in these abilities.

## What do occupational therapists do?

- Assess the clients after stroke based on individual, social and environmental factors
- Promote return to daily activities while considering the individual's physical and mental abilities
- Recommend modifications or accommodations to activities and the environment that help people surviving with stroke participate in activities at home, at school and in the community
- Evaluate driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help find alternative transportation
- Teach family members and caregivers to help minimize their risk of injury and maximize client's independence
- Address barriers to participation in active and healthy occupations by advocating for stroke related resources for all Canadians

## 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!

*A year ago, Margaret had a stroke. It's caused changes in her ability to move her right arm and leg. She stayed at the hospital rehabilitation center and resumed walking. She has to use a cane and has slowed down considerably by having to use her left hand for most tasks. What she really misses is driving to appointments, gardening and using her computer and phone as well as before. Her case manager suggested pursuing rehabilitation with an occupational therapist to help her find solutions for day-to-day challenges of living with a stroke, providing education and recommendations for assistive technologies and assessing if it would be possible for her to drive again. Because of occupational therapy, Margaret has accomplishing much more than thought was possible after her stroke.*

