



# SMALL CHANGES, BIG DIFFERENCE

## Occupational Therapy and Parkinson's

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Let's face it—Parkinson's disease doesn't exactly play fair. One day you're tying your shoes or sipping your coffee like usual, and the next, those same routines feel like climbing Everest in flip-flops. But did you know there's a health care professional who can help? An Occupational Therapist!

Occupational therapy, contrary to the confusing name, is not about finding a job. When people hear the word "occupational", they may think this is related to employment: what we do for work. Occupational therapy uses the word "occupational" because the core of the profession focuses on helping people participate in the everyday activities (or "occupations") that are important to them, promoting health and well-being through these activities. It's about helping you stay steady and self-sufficient in the things that matter most—whether that's cooking your famous chili, walking the dog, or simply getting dressed without a wrestling match with your sleeves. An Occupational therapist gives you practical tools, creative strategies, and experienced support to help you adapt and thrive, no matter where you are in your Parkinson's journey.

### **What can an OT help with?**

Occupational therapists (OTs) start by getting to know you — what you're great at, where you might need a bit of support, and what goals matter most to you. From there, they work with you to create a personalized treatment plan that fits your needs and lifestyle.

Whether it's getting dressed in the morning or preparing a meal, finding ways to make your home safer or helping you choose adaptive equipment, or working on managing stress, memory, or communication — they'll help you build or regain the skills that make everyday life enjoyable and help keep you as independent as possible. Occupational therapy covers a wide range of areas including:

- **Physical Challenges Related to daily functioning**

In this area they focus on improving fine motor skills, the small but mighty movements that let you do things like button a shirt, use utensils, write clearly, or handle tools and crafts. These skills may seem unimportant, but they make a big difference in daily life.

- **Adapting to your Environment**

Occupational therapists will take a look at your home setup to see how it can better support your daily life. Maybe the stairs could use railings, or your bathroom might be safer with grab bars. Keeping in mind accessibility and safety insight and recommendations in this area these can help you move around more confidently, comfortably, and independently.

They can also guide you (and your family) through choosing and using any helpful tools or adaptive equipment, like walkers, wheelchairs, or even special utensils. It's not just about having the right equipment but knowing how to use it in a way

that fits your routine and helps you feel more independent.

- **Cognitive/Emotional Support**

If memory, focus, or other thinking skills are getting in the way of daily life, Occupational therapists can help. They work on practical strategies to boost attention and memory, so daily tasks feel more manageable and less overwhelming.

They also support you or your loved one in developing healthy coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, or low mood — helping you feel more in control and emotionally balanced.

If communication is a challenge, they can help with that too. Whether it's finding ways to express yourself more clearly or feeling more comfortable interacting with others, we'll work together to build confidence and connection.

### How to access an Occupational Therapist

There are two routes you can go if you want to connect with an Occupational Therapist, public or private.

- **Public services** are often available through hospitals, community health centers, or programs covered by provincial or territorial health services. You might need a referral from your doctor, and there could be a bit of a wait, but it's usually free or low-cost. One of the more common points of contact with an Occupational Therapist



when you are older or have Parkinson's is through Home Care.

- **Public services** give you more flexibility — you can choose who you work with and often get started more quickly. These services have a fee; however, some costs might be covered by insurance or benefits. Check with your insurance provider to see what your policy covers. It is important to note that private Occupational Therapists may not be as widely available as other allied health professionals such as physiotherapists.

Consider an Occupational Therapist a purveyor of independence! These health care professionals can be tremendously helpful in supporting people in regaining/maintaining independence and participating fully in daily life, addressing physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges through activities and strategies that promote well-being and quality of life. ■