

Health Career Observer

The Official Newsletter of the WNY R-AHEC

December, 2024

Occupational Therapist & Assistant

Occupational therapists (OT's) evaluate and treat people who have injuries, illnesses, or disabilities to help them with vocational, daily living, and other skills that promote independence. They help clients meet goals to develop, recover, improve, and maintain skills needed for daily living and working.

Occupational therapists work in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, schools, and outpatient clinics. They stand for long periods and may need to lift or move clients.

Average Annual Pay: \$96,370

Occupational therapy assistants (OTA's) help occupational therapists provide treatments and procedures to clients. They may teach clients to move from a bed into a wheelchair or to complete self-care activities, such as bathing and getting dressed. They might help injured clients return to the workforce by teaching them to compensate for lost motor skills. Occupational therapy assistants also may work with people who have disabilities, helping them learn socialization, money management, or other skills they need to be successful and independent at school, work, or home.

Average Annual Pay: \$65,450



"Helping someone regain independence—whether it's a small achievement like taking a drink or using their phone, or a major milestone like returning home after a life-changing injury—is incredibly fulfilling."

-Simon Carson OT/L, MBA

How Do I Become an Occupational Therapist & Assistant?

**PROJECTED JOB
MARKET GROWTH:
OT: 11% OTA: 21%
BY 2033**

Occupational therapists typically need a master's degree in occupational therapy. Admission to graduate programs in occupational therapy requires a bachelor's degree, although it may not need to be in a particular subject. All states require occupational therapists to be licensed. Licensing requirements vary by state, but at a minimum, candidates must pass the national certification examination administered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT). To sit for the NBCOT exam, candidates must have earned a degree from an accredited occupational therapy program that includes fieldwork.

Occupational therapy assistants typically need an associate's degree from an accredited occupational therapy assistant program. Occupational therapy assistants usually need a state-issued license. Licensure requires completing an accredited occupational therapy assistant education program, fieldwork, and passing the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) exam.

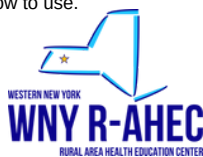
What Does an Occupational Therapist & Assistant Do?

Occupational Therapist

- ✓ Evaluate conditions by reviewing medical history, interviewing, and observing task performance.
- ✓ Develop and implement treatment plans that have specific activities to help clients work toward their goals.
- ✓ Help clients relearn and perform daily living tasks, such as teaching a person who has had a stroke how to get dressed.
- ✓ Demonstrate exercises such as stretching the joints for arthritis relief—to help relieve clients' pain.
- ✓ Evaluate a client's home, school, or workplace to identify potential accessibility improvements.
- ✓ Recommend special equipment, such as mobility aids and eating aids, and instruct clients and families on how to use.

Assistant

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Record clients' progress, report to occupational therapists, and other administrative tasks.



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A Professional Account

Simon Carson OT/L, MBA, Chief of Inpatient Occupational Therapy at the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, The University of Rochester Medical Center, gives insight on a career in Occupational Therapy.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

"The most rewarding part of my job is witnessing the progress and resilience of the patients I work with. Helping someone regain independence—whether it's a small achievement like taking a drink or using their phone, or a major milestone like returning home after a life-changing injury—is incredibly fulfilling. Seeing the positive impact of our work on patients and their families makes every challenge worthwhile."

What is the most challenging?

"One of the most challenging aspects is balancing the emotional demands of the job, particularly when working with patients who have chronic or severe conditions. It can be difficult to navigate the emotional rollercoaster while maintaining professional objectivity. Additionally, keeping up with the administrative side—documentation, insurance requirements, and time management—can sometimes feel overwhelming."

What do you wish you knew back in school that you know now?

"I wish I had known how crucial adaptability is in this field. In school, we learn protocols and theories, but in practice, every patient is unique, and flexibility is key. I also wish I had been better prepared for the business and advocacy side of healthcare, collaborating across disciplines, and advocating for patients' needs in complex systems."

Anything else you want to share?

"Occupational therapy is more than a job—it's a journey of constant learning and compassion. The field evolves with research, technology, and patient needs, so staying curious and engaged is essential. If you're considering a career in OT, know that your impact goes far beyond clinical care—you're empowering people to reclaim their lives."



Click on the image for information on a career in Occupational Therapy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbMvd-y1MWQ>



Scan Me



Click on the image for a professional account from an Occupation Therapist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=109WIBHvCkk>



Scan Me



For more information visit the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm>

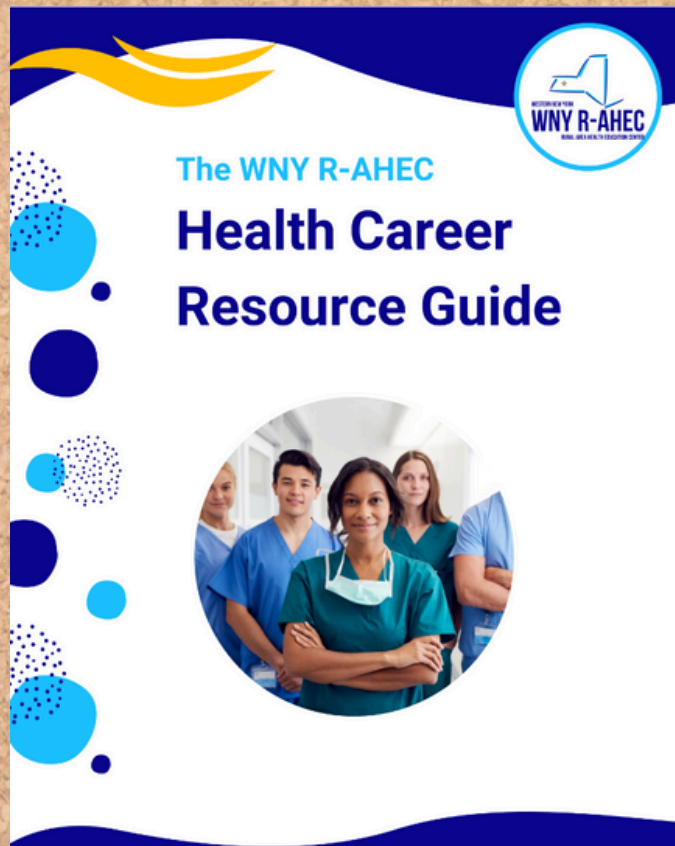
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapy-assistants-and-aides.htm>

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**Health Careers
Resource Guide
QR Code**

The Health Career Resource Guide features roughly 40 careers, health career information, and school and financial resources.