



get on the rehab therapy path

Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if occupational therapist is a good direction for you:

- 1 Would you like to help people get the skills they need to live independently?
 YES NO
- 2 Do you like to develop creative ways to address challenges?
 YES NO
- 3 Would you describe yourself as caring and compassionate?
 YES NO
- 4 Do you like to teach, help and encourage people?
 YES NO
- 5 Do you enjoy working on a team?
 YES NO
- 6 Do you prefer hands-on work?
 YES NO
- 7 Are you willing to invest six to seven years in your education?
 YES NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

What's it all about?

Brushing your teeth. Writing a check. Driving a car. These may seem like simple tasks, but people with disabilities from birth defects, injuries, illnesses, learning problems or aging may find them difficult or impossible. Occupational therapists help these people learn or regain the daily living or work skills they need to lead independent, productive, satisfying lives.

Occupational therapists often work as part of a rehabilitation team to address a patient's needs. Therapists may also specialize in working with patients of a certain age or specific disability.

What do occupational therapists do?

Some common responsibilities of occupational therapists include:

- Learn about patients' disabilities by reading medical charts and meeting with patients.
- Evaluate patients' physical and mental abilities.
- Set goals, develop treatments plans and select activities to meet patients' specific needs.
- Discuss plans and goals with other members of the rehabilitation team.
- Coordinate therapy activities with other therapists.
- Train nurses and other health care staff in therapy techniques.
- Conduct standard activities or create new ones to help patients

improve physical strength, coordination, vision, memory or reasoning.

- Prepare, clean, repair and order supplies and equipment needed for therapy sessions.
- Evaluate patients' progress and alter treatment plan, when needed.
- Maintain accurate records of patient activities and progress.
- Teach patients to use wheelchairs and other physical aids.
- Help patients find and keep jobs.
- Give advice about managing health risks in the workplace.
- Design or make special equipment, such as splints or eating utensils, that patients need at work or home.
- Recommend ways for patients to change living or work areas to meet needs and abilities.
- Refer patients to other appropriate community and health care resources.
- Lead programs to promote health and awareness of disabilities.

How much money can I make?

In Alaska, occupational therapists earn an average hourly wage of \$33.42, and have an average annual salary of \$69,513.

How do I become an occupational therapist? How long does it take?

To become an occupational therapist, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Earn a bachelor's degree.
- Graduate with a master's degree in occupational therapy.
- Complete six to nine months of clinical experience after graduation.
- Pass a national occupational therapy exam.
- Obtain a state license.

Occupational therapy students must first earn a four-year bachelor's degree; common areas of study include biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology or anatomy. They then must complete a master's degree program, which takes an additional two to three years. Some occupational therapists go on to complete a doctoral degree, which takes an additional three to five years.

An occupational therapy program operated by Creighton University and hosted by the University of Alaska Anchorage will be available beginning in August 2008. Learn more by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

Attention high school students!

Think you want to become an occupational therapist? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college-preparatory and advanced placement (AP) classes. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Introduction to health care
- Health occupations
- Advanced biology
- Advanced chemistry
- Anatomy and physiology
- Physics
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Art
- Keyboarding
- Computer applications

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community. It's also a good idea to get some volunteer experience at hospitals, nursing homes or with community organizations.

Are there jobs available?

There are currently about seven job openings a year for occupational therapists in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow (19.1 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

Where are the jobs?

Occupational therapists in Alaska work in hospitals, medical offices, schools, nursing homes, home health care agencies, infant learning programs, educational organizations, prisons, government agencies, and community, rehabilitation or outpatient centers. Many occupational therapists also operate their own private practice.

What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the rehab therapy career pathway? Be sure to read about physical therapists – another rehab therapy "hot job" in Alaska!

