

The Fields of Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy: What's the Difference?

OT vs PT: One Basic Difference (St. Catherine University OTA 2017)

The main difference between occupational therapy and physical therapy is that OT focuses on improving a client's ability to perform **activities of daily living (ADL)** and PT focuses on improving a client's ability to perform **movement and function**.

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who specialize in examination and treatment of movement impairments. PTs treat people of all ages who have experienced trauma, pain, and/or functional limitations which restrict movement and impair performance of functional activities. PTs use a variety of conservative treatment techniques such as manual therapy, exercise and balance retraining to promote tissue healing and restore mobility and function to optimal levels. PTs work with patients to prevent the loss of mobility/function by developing wellness programs for healthier, more active lifestyles.

Occupational therapists (OTs) are health care professionals who specialize in the examination and treatment of conditions that impact activities of daily living (ADLs). OTs treat people of all ages who have experienced trauma, pain, and/or functional limitations which impact ADLs. OTs design treatment plans and assist patients with a variety of functional activities to improve function, visual, cognitive, and general coordination skills. The goal of occupational therapy is to facilitate a patient's ability to perform ADLs with the highest degree of independence possible.

PTs/OTs provide care in a variety of settings including hospitals, private practices, schools, sports arena, fitness facilities, and worksites.

What is the difference between occupational and physical therapy?

Physical therapists specialize in conservative management of tissue related problems known as neuromusculoskeletal conditions. They rely upon detailed history, physical examination, specialized testing to determine movement impairments and functional limitations which would benefit from skilled, hands-on treatment.

Occupational therapists specialize in conservative and holistic management of ADL restrictions. They utilize a broad range of approaches to address cognitive, social, physical impairments which keep patients from doing daily tasks. These can range from simple tasks to complex job activities.

Although the fields of PT and OT serve different health care roles, there are similarities:

- Educate people how to safely resume work, sports, life and avoid injuries.
- Educate people about the healing process and benefit of healthy choices.
- Assist people with improving their ability to perform daily activities through manual therapy, movement and balance re-training and coaching/mentoring.
- Both play very important roles in recovery & rehab