

Occupational Therapist

Help people do the ordinary things again: dress, cook, write, drive, go back to work. Six years of school, a license, and work in almost every town.

TYPICAL PAY

\$100,330

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$72k to \$132k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

6 to 7 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Hospitals, schools, rehab clinics,
nursing homes, patients' houses**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, anatomy if it is offered, psychology and statistics. Get volunteer hours in a clinic or a special education classroom.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major is allowed. Kinesiology, psychology and biology are the common ones because they cover the prerequisite courses.
- 3 Master's or doctorate in occupational therapy** 2 to 3 years
At a program accredited by ACOTE (the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education). The master's is the shorter and more common entry route.
- 4 Level 2 fieldwork** About 6 months
Two full-time placements, about 24 weeks total, working with real patients under a supervising therapist. Unpaid.
- 5 Exam and license** Final months
Pass the national certification exam from NBCOT (the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy), then apply to your state board for a license.

Pros and cons

- + You watch people get their lives back, week by week
- + Work in hospitals, schools, homes, prisons or clinics with the same license
- + Hiring is growing fast and you can move anywhere
- Six or seven years and a graduate loan before your first paycheck
- Two unpaid full-time fieldwork placements to get through
- Productivity targets in nursing homes can push you to treat by the clock

Optional boosts

Certified Hand Therapist. Pediatrics. Driving rehabilitation. Low vision.

Good to know

The job was invented for wounded soldiers

Occupational therapy grew out of the First World War, when women called reconstruction aides were sent to army hospitals to get injured soldiers using their hands again through weaving, woodwork and typi...

It is not physical therapy

People mix them up constantly. A physical therapist works on the movement itself: strength, balance, walking. An occupational therapist works on the task you want the movement for: buttoning a shirt, maki...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Occupational Therapists (29-1122.00)
National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy
Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education
University of Southern California, Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/occupational-therapist>



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