

Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides

Professional Activities

Occupational therapy assistants and aides help patients develop, recover, and improve the skills needed for daily living and working. Occupational therapy assistants are directly involved in providing therapy to patients, while occupational therapy aides typically perform support activities. Both assistants and aides work under the direction of occupational therapists.

Occupational therapy assistants typically do the following:

- Help patients do therapeutic activities, such as stretches and other exercises
- Lead children who have developmental disabilities in play activities that promote coordination and socialization
- Teach patients how to use special equipment; for example, showing a patient with Parkinson's disease how to use devices that make eating easier
- Record patients' progress, report to occupational therapists, and do other administrative tasks

Occupational therapy aides typically do the following:

- Prepare treatment areas, such as setting up therapy equipment
- Transport patients
- Clean treatment areas and equipment
- Help patients with billing and insurance forms
- Perform clerical tasks, including scheduling appointments and answering telephone

Occupational therapy assistants and aides spend much of their time on their feet setting up equipment and, in the case of assistants, working with patients. Constant kneeling and stooping are part of the job, as is the need to sometimes lift patients. Most occupational therapy assistants and aides work full time. Occupational therapy assistants and aides may work during evenings or on weekends to accommodate patients' schedules.

Educational Requirements

Occupational therapy assistants need an associate's degree from an accredited occupational therapy assistant program. They also must be licensed in most states. Licensure typically requires the completion of an accredited occupational therapy assistant education program, completion of all fieldwork requirements, and passing the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) exam and then they may use the title "Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant" (COTA). Some states have additional requirements. They must also take continuing education classes to maintain certification.

Occupational therapy assistant programs are commonly found in community colleges and technical schools. In March 2013, there were 162 occupational therapy assistant programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education, a branch of the American Occupational Therapy Association. These programs generally require 2 years of full-time study. They include classroom instruction in subjects such as psychology, biology, and pediatric health. Occupational therapy assistants also must complete at least 16 weeks of fieldwork as part of their education to gain hands-on work experience.

Occupational therapy aides typically have a high school diploma or equivalent. They are trained on the job under the supervision of more experienced assistants or aides. Training can last from several weeks to a few months and covers a number of topics, including set up of therapy equipment and infection control

procedures, among others. Prior work experience in healthcare as well as CPR and Basic Life Support (BLS) certifications may be helpful in getting a job. Occupational therapy aides are not regulated.

Academic Programs

[Illinois Central College](#)

[John A Logan College](#)

[Lewis and Clark](#)

[Lincoln Land Community College](#)

[McHenry County College](#)

[Parkland College](#)

[Shawnee Community College](#)

[South Suburban College](#)

[Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market](#)

[Wilbur Wright](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Demand for occupational therapy assistants is expected to stem from healthcare providers employing more assistants to reduce the cost of occupational therapy services. After the therapist has evaluated a patient and designed a treatment plan, the occupational therapy assistant can provide many aspects of the treatment that the therapist prescribed. Another demand for occupational therapy services is related to the ability of patients to pay, either directly or through health insurance. The number of individuals who have access to occupational therapy services may increase because of federal health insurance reform. Both rehabilitation and habilitation services are listed among the essential health benefits that insurers will need to cover once reforms are implemented. Occupational therapy assistants and aides will be needed to help therapists treat additional patients and to ensure that treatment facility operations run smoothly.

State and National Wages (Occupational Therapy Assistants)

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$22.50	\$29.68	\$38.56
	Annual	\$46,810	\$61,730	\$80,210
Illinois	Hourly	\$20.79	\$29.70	\$37.74
	Annual	\$43,230	\$61,770	\$78,500

State and National Trends (Occupational Therapy Assistants)

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Occupational Therapy Assistants	43,400	54,500	25%	8,700
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Occupational Therapy Assistants	2,330	2,890	+24%	380

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

State and National Wages (Occupational Therapy Aides)

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$11.47	\$16.14	\$29.79
	Annual	\$23,860	\$33,560	\$61,960
Illinois	Hourly	\$14.42	\$18.27	\$23.17
	Annual	\$29,990	\$38,000	\$48,190

State and National Trends for Occupational Therapy Aides

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Occupational Therapy Aides	3,500	4,000	14%	600
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Occupational Therapy Aides	1,490	1,670	12%	210

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

American Occupational Therapy Association (aota.org)

National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (bcot.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapy-assistants-and-aides>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-2011.00> and
<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-2012.00>)

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