

Occupational Therapists

(All information, except UB degree program information, is from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004-2005 Occupational Outlook Handbook.)

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- **UB Graduate Programs:**
 - [MS Occupational Therapy](#)
 - [PhD Rehabilitation Science](#)
 - [Adv. Cert in Assistive and Rehabilitative Technology](#)
- **UB Undergraduate Programs:**
 - [BS/MS Occupational Therapy/Occupational Science](#)

Significant Points

- Employment is projected to increase faster than the average, as rapid growth in the number of middle-aged and elderly individuals increases the demand for therapeutic services.
- A bachelor's degree in occupational therapy is the minimum educational requirement; beginning in 2007, however, a master's degree or higher will be required.
- Occupational therapists are increasingly taking on supervisory roles.
- More than a quarter of occupational therapists work part time.

Employment

Occupational therapists held about 82,000 jobs in 2002. About 1 in 10 occupational therapists held more than one job. The largest number of jobs was in hospitals. Other major employers were offices of other health practitioners (which includes offices of occupational therapists), public and private educational services, and nursing care facilities. Some occupational therapists were employed by home healthcare services, outpatient care centers, offices of physicians, individual and family services, community care facilities for the elderly, and government agencies.

A small number of occupational therapists were self-employed in private practice. These practitioners saw clients referred by physicians or other health professionals or provided contract or consulting services to nursing care facilities, schools, adult daycare programs, and home healthcare agencies.

Job Outlook

Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2012. The impact of proposed Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the job market for occupational therapists in the near term. However, over the long run, the demand for occupational therapists should continue to rise as a result of growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function who require therapy services. The baby-boom generation's movement into middle age, a period when the incidence of heart attack and stroke increases, will spur the demand for therapeutic services. Growth in the population 75 years and older—an age group that suffers from high incidences of disabling conditions—also will increase the demand for therapeutic services. In addition, medical advances now enable more patients with critical problems to survive—patients who ultimately may need extensive therapy.

Hospitals will continue to employ a large number of occupational therapists to provide therapy services to acutely ill inpatients. Hospitals also will need occupational therapists to staff their outpatient rehabilitation programs.

Employment growth in schools will result from the expansion of the school-age population and extended services for disabled students. Therapists will be needed to help children with disabilities prepare to enter special education programs.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of occupational therapists were \$51,990 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$42,910 and \$ 61,620. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$35,130, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$74,390. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of occupational therapists in 2002 were as follows:

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| Offices of other health practitioners | \$53,660 |
| Nursing care facilities | 53,930 |
| General medical and surgical hospitals | 53,210 |
| Elementary and secondary schools | 45,740 |

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Currently, a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy is the minimum requirement for entry into this field. Beginning in 2007, however, a master's degree or higher will be the minimum educational requirement. As a result, students in bachelor's-level programs should complete their coursework and fieldwork before 2007. All States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia regulate the practice of occupational therapy. To obtain a license, applicants must graduate from an accredited educational program and pass a

national certification examination. Those who pass the exam are awarded the title “Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR).”

In 2003, entry-level education was offered in 38 bachelor’s degree programs, 3 postbaccalaureate certificate programs for students with a degree other than occupational therapy, and 86 entry-level master’s degree programs. There were 48 programs that offered a combined bachelor’s and master’s degree and 5 offered an entry-level doctoral degree. Most schools have full-time programs, although a growing number also offer weekend or part-time programs.

Occupational therapy coursework includes physical, biological, and behavioral sciences and the application of occupational therapy theory and skills. Completion of 6 months of supervised fieldwork also is required.

Persons considering this profession should take high school courses in biology, chemistry, physics, health, art, and the social sciences. College admissions offices also look favorably at paid or volunteer experience in the healthcare field.

Occupational therapists need patience and strong interpersonal skills to inspire trust and respect in their clients. Ingenuity and imagination in adapting activities to individual needs are assets. Those working in home healthcare services must be able to adapt to a variety of settings.