



Occupational therapy and **MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

Occupational therapy
Helping people to live life their way



If you are living with multiple sclerosis (MS), an occupational therapist can support and guide you to manage your symptoms to help you lead a fulfilling life.

What is occupational therapy?

Occupational therapy can help you to do activities that you may have difficulty doing every day as a result of having MS. This might include going to work, carrying on with a hobby, or basic tasks such as eating, bathing or getting dressed.

An occupational therapist can suggest making changes to your physical environment, or altering the way you do a task, or show you how to relearn to do something.

How can occupational therapy help you if you are living with MS?

Occupational therapists work in health and social care and can support you to manage a range of physical, mental or emotional symptoms. They can also address other needs such as housing adaptations, or if required, address any re-housing issues.

We have listed below ways that an occupational therapist can help you cope with the common symptoms caused by MS:

Fatigue

Fatigue can affect mental and physical abilities.

An occupational therapist can increase your understanding of when and why fatigue occurs. They can examine your daily routine and provide suggestions on structuring activities and rest periods to maximise your energy levels.

Tremors

Tremors and other sensory changes can be disruptive.

An occupational therapist can assess you and recommend techniques to reduce any difficulties you have with sensory problems, such as ways to cope with your pain, tremors or numbness. The occupational therapist will also help you to identify what makes your tremors worse, and find ways to counter them.

Unsteadiness

The fear of falling can prevent you from doing the things you want to do.

An occupational therapist can give advice about reducing your risk of falling and can assess you at home, at work, or in an outdoor environment to identify any obstacles that may cause falls. They may recommend equipment or aids to help you to remain stable on your feet. They can also show you how to get up safely if you do fall.

Working life

An MS diagnosis can sometimes mean changes to your working life.

If your MS is affecting your performance at work, an occupational therapist can help you to identify problem areas and find ways to overcome them and remain in work, if desired. An occupational therapist can also tell

you about the support available to help you whilst at work, and travelling to and from work. They can also advise your employer on workplace modifications, if these are needed.

Driving abilities

The ability to drive can be affected by weakness in the legs or hands, fatigue, blurred vision or memory difficulties as a result of having MS.

An occupational therapist can arrange a specialist driving assessment, and can show you techniques and recommend equipment to help you get in and out of your car independently. The occupational therapist may also suggest adaptations to your vehicle to keep you safe while driving.

Emotional support

MS can impact on you and your family. You may be worried about how you and your family will cope.

Feeling worried is natural. An occupational therapist can support you and your family to live positively, helping you to focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't; for example, by assisting you to establish personal goals.

[**www.COT.org.uk**](http://www.COT.org.uk)



Further information about occupational therapy

Occupational therapists are health and social care professionals who can help people of all ages – babies, children, adults and older people – to carry out activities they need or want to do, but are prevented from doing so as a result of physical or mental illness, disability, or from the effects of ageing.

Activities can include the necessities of daily living such as getting dressed, preparing a meal, going to work or simply continuing with a favourite hobby. Occupational therapists work with individuals to find alternative ways to carry on with activities to enable people to live life their way.



An occupational therapist can:

- Guide children with co-ordination disorders to develop new skills, to help them remain at school and reach their full potential
- Assess and recommend equipment such as mobility aids, wheelchairs and artificial limbs and, if needed, advise on special devices to help around the home, school or workplace
- Help people with low mood or depression gain a sense of responsibility, achievement and self worth
- Support people with work-related issues to re-prioritise tasks to improve their work-life balance

For leisure, learning, living or working
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How to find an occupational therapist

Ask your GP, nurse, social worker or other health or social care professional to refer you to an occupational therapist.

You can self-refer to a social services occupational therapist by contacting your local council* to arrange an appointment.

Some places of work have an HR department or occupational health department. You can ask either of these to refer you to an occupational therapist.

To arrange a private consultation with an independent occupational therapist, who will charge you a fee, please visit **www.cotss-ip.org.uk** to find a local independent occupational therapist.

*Social work departments in Scotland

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland

For more information about occupational therapy, visit the College of Occupational Therapists website:
www.COT.org.uk

For more information about how the MS Society can support you and your family, visit:
www.mssociety.org.uk

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