



Do you have a parent who is struggling to complete daily tasks on their own?

Maybe you've tried to help them, but your strategies just don't seem to be effective?

They want to maintain their independence but seem to not be managing. One of the toughest parts of the aging process is losing the ability to do things that once were incredibly simple. When people lose the ability to complete everyday tasks, they tend to feel confused, frustrated, and sometimes even embarrassed.

Luckily, your parent does not have to feel this way. There are ways you can help your elderly parent gain more control over their life.

What we are referring to is **occupational therapy in the field of Geriatrics** which is working with the **elderly population**.

Occupational Therapy is a client-centred health profession that is concerned with the promotion of health and wellbeing through occupation, with the primary goal of enabling people to participate in everyday activities (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, June 2017 (revised)).

Occupational therapy is a process that involves helping people at all stages of life (from toddlers to elderly) develop, maintain, or recover the skills they need to daily activities (aka occupations) that are meaningful and necessary. In South Africa, **Occupational therapists** work with elderly patients to empower them to maintain a level of independence by teaching them exercise and

cognitive rehabilitation techniques that make completing their daily tasks, such as dressing, eating, and bathing, much easier. Occupational therapists help these clients continue to participate in leisure tasks, maintain their overall strength as well as well fine and basic motor skills with strategies to compensate for difficulties they may be having with their memory and organisation skills. They also look at their safety in when accessing their community as well as their community mobility skills which includes driving. Occupational therapists also educate and work with the client's support team (family, caregivers, etc) to make sure everyone understands their role in relation to the client's care program.

WHAT DOES THIS ENTAIL?

Often as your family member or parent start to lose struggle to take care of themselves and their home, they are needing help and support. But they are proud and don't want to just give in or accept help. This may also impact their mental wellness and they then withdraw from their community and limit their social interaction and outings.

They are protecting themselves and their dignity because they struggle to interact with people as they are not able to always remember conversations or forget who people are.

They appear to have lost their purpose and this can often lead to behaviour and personality changes. They are then threatened with having to adjust their lifestyle by moving from their family home to a facility and may even be told they must stop driving. This is very upsetting for them.

When you identify this happening, please reach out to your doctor or community support to locate an Occupational Therapist who specialises in Geriatrics to get involved in their care.

## WHY WOULD AN OLDER PERSON NEED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

## WHO ARE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS?

Occupational therapy is a regulated health profession and requires specific university training which complies with national and international standards of training.

The training of an OT requires the holistic approaches well suited for work in **the field of geriatric care and rehabilitation**. Occupational therapists work closely within the multidisciplinary team with doctors, physiotherapists, speech therapists and various other healthcare professionals.

## WHAT AREAS CAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY HELP THE ELDERLY IN?

- Promote independence in performing daily personal care tasks
- Home modifications to ensure safety and prevent falls
- Strategies to manage their diary and appointments
- Visual aids & modifications
- Community mobility & driving concerns
- Memory problems
- Planning & organization problems
- Pain management with Arthritis
- Promoting leisure task engagement Isolating from friends and family
- Adjustment to life changes & transition
- Education & caregiver support

## WHERE CAN I GET OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

Occupational therapists provide intervention with the elderly services in the following settings:

- Acute hospitals
- Frail care and step down facilities
- Retirement Villages
- Out-patient centres

## HOW DO I SCHEDULE AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY APPOINTMENT?

Chat to your GP and possibly consider an appointment with a specialist in the care of an elderly namely a Geriatrician.

### PRACTICE: