



Occupational Therapy and Chronic Pain

You have been invited to attend an Occupational Therapy assessment for pain management with an Occupational Therapist. This document explains what an Occupational Therapist is, and how they can assist people who live with long-term pain (also known as 'chronic' or persistent pain).

What is an Occupational Therapist?

Occupational Therapists are health and social care professionals who help people of all ages carry out activities they need or want to do, but are prevented from doing as a result of physical or mental illness, disability, or the effects of aging. Activities can include everyday tasks, such as getting dressed, preparing a meal, going to work, or simply continuing with a favourite hobby. Occupational Therapists work with individuals to help them find alternative ways to carry on with activities to enable them to live life to the fullest by maximising independence and safety.

What is the role of an Occupational Therapist in a pain service?

Living with chronic pain can affect all aspects of a person's life-how they move, think, sleep, feel, and carry out everyday activities. It is a very personal experience, and how a person experiences pain affects how they deal with it and the impact it has on them. If pain stops a person from doing the things they want to, or need to do, then this will probably leave them feeling frustrated and low in mood, which unfortunately can exacerbate pain.

Occupational Therapists can help people carry out activities, despite experiencing pain, by:

- advising on various strategies to help with pain management, such as pacing, planning and prioritising activities
- providing or suggesting assistive equipment, if needed, to promote independence and safety when carrying out various tasks
- suggesting techniques to help with energy conservation and muscle and joint protection

Occupational Therapists work with people who have chronic pain to help them understand their condition and to develop more effective ways of coping with and managing their pain.

How can seeing an Occupational Therapist help with chronic pain?

An Occupational Therapist uses their professional expertise in understanding how the body works when doing everyday activities and tasks.

Following a detailed assessment, an Occupational Therapist can apply problem-solving techniques to enable people to manage their pain and break the cycle of thinking about it, so they can continue with activities that they enjoy and need to do.

Seeing an Occupational Therapist can help people accept and adjust to their pain as best they can.

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An Occupational Therapist can help people to:

- Remain Active – by gradually building up a person’s stamina through scheduled activities, which may include the use of assistive equipment or technology
- Improve back care –by helping to develop strategies for bending, reaching and lifting
- Relax and Sleep-by suggesting alternatives to medication to induce sleep, such as relaxation techniques, or the use of assistive equipment to promote bed mobility and comfort
- Cope with continuous pain- by developing daily routines to help with prioritising activities and by using coping strategies, such as distraction
- Remain in/ return to work-by identifying and discussing ways to reduce pain –causing hazards at work, and recommending alternative ways of working.
- Improve quality of life- by discussing life-style changes

What does seeing an Occupational Therapist involve?

When a person is referred to an Occupational Therapist, they will be offered an assessment appointment, either for an individual assessment in clinic, or for a home visit assessment (if necessary to fully understand the difficulties someone may be experiencing in their home environment).

Appointments usually take up to an hour.

This appointment will involve discussing the person’s pain and its impact on their overall well-being, as well as an observation of how the person moves, transfers and carries out functional everyday tasks. At the end of the assessment, the Occupational Therapist will discuss the options available and together with the person will decide the next step. This could include:

- further individual sessions addressing the issues discussed in the assessment
- group work
- referral on to other professionals in the pain service
- referral to other services outside of the pain team
- provision of assistive equipment, or no further action.

Occupational Therapists in the Pain team do not offer physical treatments or medication. Their focus is on helping people to develop strategies for adapting to and with their pain. It is not about finding a cure.

A person is more than welcome to have someone accompany them to the assessment.

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Confidentiality and information sharing

Occupational Therapists will share only the information which is relevant to your care with other members of the pain management service. They will keep all other information confidential (private). Any reports or letters that are sent out will be with your consent and you will also receive a copy.

Pain Management Occupational Therapy Staff:

Clarissa Gregory

If you would like to know more about Occupational Therapy and Pain management:

You can find out more information on the COT website, at www.COT.org.uk and the British Pain Society, at: www.britishpainsociety.org

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