

Occupational therapist

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Occupational Therapists are members of the multi-disciplinary team involved in the treatment and management of people with rheumatoid arthritis. They are also referred to as OTs; however, Occupational Therapist is the preferred professional title. All Occupational therapists must be Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered if they are to use this title. The HCPC role is to protect the public whether they receive care through the NHS or via private practitioners; ensuring practitioners update and develop knowledge and skills relevant to clinical practice.

Occupational therapists work with you and other members of the team for example physiotherapists, clinical nurse specialists, podiatrists and orthotists to make sure that you feel supported, and that your short and long-term needs are addressed.

‘Occupation’ as a term refers to practical and purposeful activities that allow people to live independently and have a sense of identity. This could be essential day-to-day tasks such as self-care, work or leisure. Occupational therapy provides practical support to empower you to facilitate recovery and overcome barriers preventing you from doing the activities (or occupations) that matter to you. This support aims to increase your independence and satisfaction in all aspects of life.

When will you see an Occupational Therapist?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), states adults with RA should have ongoing access to a multi-disciplinary team. This should provide the opportunity for periodic assessment of the effect of the disease on your life (such as pain, fatigue, everyday activities, mobility, ability to work or take part in social or leisure activities, quality of life, mood, impact on sexual relationships) and help you manage your condition.

Occupational therapists have a key role throughout the course of your disease. The extent of their involvement with you will vary throughout that time, dependent upon your needs.

What can Occupational Therapy offer you?

The role of occupational therapy for people with rheumatological conditions includes a variety of interventions to support self-management, enhance occupational performance and facilitate independence, enabling you to function at an optimal level, despite barriers.

Key areas for intervention:

- Advice about managing your daily activities (for example, washing, dressing) when your symptoms are active. If appropriate, arrange for equipment or devices to assist with daily activities. This may involve a referral to social services regards equipment or modifications
- Advice and education about protecting your joints, splints to support your joints to reduce pain and inflammation
- Address problems with hand function; where possible, provide tailored strengthening and stretching hand exercise programme. This must be delivered by a practitioner with training and skills in this area.
- Fatigue management
- Discussing your condition, how to accept the changes this brings and what you can do to help
- Advice around employment and remaining in paid employment
- Relaxation and help with sleep problems
- Encourage self-management, ensuring activities you need or want to do can be modified or adapted to make them easier
- Referral to local exercise, health and wellbeing groups

Future Care

You will continue to have regular reviews with a Rheumatology Consultant and Specialist Nurse. Depending on the service your units provide, you may have routine Occupational Therapy reviews or be re-referred to Occupational Therapy if necessary. Some units also offer a self-referral service allowing you access as and when required.

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