

FINDING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST TO MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN

Occupational therapists (OTs) help people living with injury, illness or disability, such as chronic pain, improve, maintain, or restore their ability to perform everyday tasks, including self-care, leisure, education, home management, volunteering, work, and much more. Occupational therapy may include:

- Education, collaborative goal setting, and learning strategies to manage pain while working towards your goals
- Obtaining aids and specialized equipment
- Evaluating and modifying the home, school or work environments
- It may be done in person or virtually

For more information on occupational therapists, visit the following website: cotbc.org/public/what-occupational-therapists-do.

FINDING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

In BC, occupational therapists can be found working in both the public sector (i.e., hospitals, pain clinics, schools, long-term care facilities, etc.) and private clinics.

The following resources may be helpful in locating an occupational therapist near you:

- caot.ca/site/findot
- painbc.ca/supportline
- painbc.ca/directory

CHOOSING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

When choosing an occupational therapist in BC, you should search for one who is with the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC) on their website: cotbc.org. Those registered with the COTBC must uphold the College's standards of practice and code of ethical conduct.

Once you have selected an occupational therapist, you may consider requesting an initial consultation to ensure they are the right fit for you. The occupational therapist may offer a free consultation. During this initial consultation, you may consider asking the following questions to better understand their approach to treating people with chronic pain:

- What can you teach me to support me with managing daily activities?
- How can you help me work towards my goals at home, work, and leisure?
- How have you helped other people living with chronic pain in the past?

An occupational therapist with knowledge of chronic pain will answer the above questions with:

- An emphasis on function (getting you back to activities that are important in your life).
- An emphasis on a holistic approach to care that includes various aspects of your day-to-day life.
- Helping you with mental health challenges and acceptance of chronic pain.
- Providing best practice education on chronic pain (the “science” of pain).

You may also consider asking about any additional training they have in chronic pain, such these courses, or other accredited professional education:

- Pain Canada – Pain Foundations: <https://www.paincanada.ca/course/pain-foundations>
- Pain Canada – Moving Through Pain (formerly Gentle Movement and Relaxation): <https://www.paincanada.ca/course/moving-through-pain>
- Pain BC – Best Practice Chronic Pain Management for Occupational Therapists
- Post graduate certificate in Chronic Pain Management (i.e., [University of Alberta](#) and [McGill](#))
- Training in Motivational Interviewing
- Attendance at Pacific Pain Forum (annual pain conference): pacificpainforum.ca

PAYING FOR PRIVATE-PAY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational therapy clinics often accept extended health benefits, such as employer-provided insurance, to cover the cost of sessions. If you have this type of coverage, you should confirm with your prospective occupational therapist or occupational therapy clinic to ensure they will accept your benefits. Along with this, you can check with your insurer that they will cover your prospective practitioner and understand any maximum amounts they will pay for occupational therapy. It is important to note that not all clinics and/or insurers offer direct billing, so if paying out of pocket until you are reimbursed will be difficult, you should factor this into your decision-making as well.

In addition, if you have an active ICBC or WorkSafe BC file, they may cover the cost of occupational therapy; if you are interested in accessing an occupational therapist for pain management and have an active ICBC or WorkSafe BC file, inquire directly with your case manager.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OF YOUR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SESSION

Going to an occupational therapist may seem overwhelming and intimidating if you do not know what to expect or have not had successful experiences in the past. Here are a few tips to help you plan for a productive and positive experience:

- Create a plan and have a goal. Ensure your occupational therapist works collaboratively with you to identify and develop goals that are important to you (i.e., leisure, social engagement, employment, etc.).
- Ensure your occupational therapist has equipped you with tools to continue moving forward with your goals, post treatment (i.e., talking about accommodations/equipment recommendations needed in the community/workplace/post-secondary, utilizing pacing strategies, adapting/modifying daily activities, managing fatigue, referrals to community services, etc.)
- Have concrete, specific goals to work on between sessions
- Take notes of things you may want to discuss with your occupational therapist at your next session

To recap, evidence-informed pain care and pain management from an occupational therapist should:

- Involve a holistic approach (i.e., looking at various aspects of your day-to-day life).
- Develop goals in collaboration with you focused on improving function (getting you back to activities that are important in your life)
- Equip you with tools to continue working towards your goals, post treatment (i.e., accommodations, equipment, adapting/modifying daily activities, managing fatigue, etc.)
- Provide pain education so you understand the importance of self-care and movement.
(www.liveplanbe.ca)

RESOURCES

- Pain Support Line: painbc.ca/supportline
- HealthLink BC: healthlinkbc.ca

REFERENCES

- College of Occupational Therapists of BC: cotbc.org

- HealthLink BC resource on occupational therapy: www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/occupational-therapy

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