

Occupational Therapy for Dementia - A Brief Overview

Occupational Therapy is **way more than occupation**.

Occupational Therapy for people with dementia provides support for personally relevant daily activities and thus contributes significantly to sustaining **independence** and satisfaction of people with dementia, as well as to **lessen the burden for family caregivers**.

The **therapy** contains (among other things):

- **daily activities** - **individual priorities**, interests and strengths are considered
- **counselling/education** for family caregivers - regarding the course of the disease, ADL training, resources etc.
- (re)**arrangement** of the environment - to **reduce falls**, to **strengthen orientation** etc.
- **practice** of the use of aids - e.g., training to use a walker-rollator

Occupational Therapy has a **positive** impact in the following areas:

- **independence** of people with dementia is increased and/or sustained ^{1,2}
- people with dementia are being **mobilized** and can (again) pursue their important activities, ^{1,3} which increases their **self-esteem**
- **problematic behaviour** is reduced ^{1,4}
- **quality of life** is increased ⁴
- **strain** for family caregivers is **reduced** ^{2,4}

The supply of Occupational Therapy can be **extrabudgetary** for dementia.

Occupational Therapy **should take place as a home visit**, as the personal **living environment** is constantly being referred to.

Occupational Therapy can be applied in **different stages** but should **ideally** be initiated **when the diagnosis is made**.

The “S3-Leitlinie Demenzen” (S3 guidelines for dementia) recommends ADL training for dementia.

“There’s evidence that occupational, individually tailored interventions for patients with mild to moderate dementia with the involvement of reference persons contributes to sustaining daily function. The application should be offered.”

Empfehlungsgrad B, Evidenzebene Ib, Leitlinienadaptation NICE-SCIE 2007 (S3-Leitlinie Demenzen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Neurologie, & Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie, Psychosomatik und Nervenheilkunde)

A few evidences of efficacy

- [1] Gitlin, L., Corcoran, M., & Winter, L. (2001). A randomized, controlled trial of a home environmental intervention: Effect on efficacy and upset in caregivers and on daily function of persons with dementia. *The Gerontologist*, 41, 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/41.1.4>
- [2] Graff, M. J. L., Vernooij-Dassen, M. J. M., Thijssen, M., Dekker, J., Hoefnagels, W. H. L., & Olde Rikkert, M. G. M. (2006). Community based occupational therapy for patients with dementia and their care givers: randomised controlled trial. *BMJ*, 333, 1196-1199. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39001.688843.BE>
- [3] Phinney, A., Chaudhury, H., & O’Connor, D. L. (2007). Doing as much as I can do: The meaning of activity for people with dementia. *Aging & Mental Health*, 11, 384-393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860601086470>
- [4] Pimouguet, C., Le Goff, M., Wittwer, J., Dartigues, J.-F., & Helmer, C. (2016). Benefits of occupational therapy in dementia patients: Findings from a real-world observational study. *Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease*, 56, 509-517. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JAD-160820>

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- Flotho, W., & Sibold, C. (2014). *HED-I Häusliche Ergotherapie bei Demenz. Interventionsprogramm für Menschen mit leichter bis mittlerer Demenz und ihre Angehörigen im häuslichen Umfeld*. Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner.
- Gitlin, L., & Corcoran, M. (2005). *Occupational therapy and dementia care. The home environmental skill-building program for individuals and families*. North Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.
- Holthoff, V., Reuster, T., & Schützwohl, M. (2013). *ERGODEM. Häusliche Ergotherapie bei Demenz - ein Leitfaden für die Praxis*. Stuttgart: Thieme.
- Voigt-Radloff, S., Rühlemann, A., & Hüll, M. (2012). *WHEDA - Wirksame Häusliche Ergotherapie für Demenzerkrankte und Angehörige. Behandlungsmanual*. Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner.

Further information can be found at:

DVE (Deutscher Verband der Ergotherapeuten / German Association of Occupational Therapists):

<https://dve.info>

<https://dve.info/ergotherapie/infos-fuer-aerzte>

BED (Bundesverband für Ergotherapeuten in Deutschland e.V. / Federal Association for Occupational Therapists in Germany e.V.):

<https://www.bed-ev.de/home/default.aspx>

Frau Gudrun Schaade (Occupational therapist, author):

<http://www.schaade.de>

Questions or comments

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

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I would be particularly happy about feedback regarding whether / how this information had an impact on your prescription behaviour and / or what is still keeping you from recommending (even more) Occupational Therapy for people with dementia.