

What is the difference between an Occupational Therapist and an Ergonomist?

What is ergonomics?

Ergonomics is derived from two Greek words: *ergo*, meaning work, and *nomos*, meaning natural laws. Combined, they create a word that means the science of work and a person's relationship to work. When applied, ergonomics is a discipline focused on making the environment, products and tasks efficient for the user. In the workplace, application of ergonomic principles is promoted to enhance worker safety and comfort.

Questions often arise about who is qualified to apply ergonomic principles in the workplace. Occupational Therapists and Ergonomists both provide ergonomic services. There is considerable variability in the training and certification of ergonomic consultants; the onus is on the consumer to ensure that the consultant's education and training are adequate for their workplace needs. So, what is the difference?

What is an Occupational Therapist?

Occupational Therapists are university-educated, regulated health professionals whose training enables them to understand the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and environmental factors of disability or injury that may affect an individual's ability to function. Occupational Therapists work in a variety of practice areas and with a wide range of individuals and organizations. Many occupational therapists focus on work-related prevention and intervention services, including ergonomics.

What is an Ergonomist? Is a Certified Ergonomist something different?

Anyone with ergonomic training can call themselves an *ergonomist*. The term *ergonomist* is not a regulated designation; the scope and intensity of the training is quite variable.

Certified Ergonomist is a protected title. Providers with a range of academic backgrounds, including occupational therapists, can apply to be recognized as an Associate Ergonomist (AE) by the Canadian College for the Certification of Professional Ergonomists (CCCPE). When the provider acquires the relevant professional experience in the field of ergonomics, he/she can apply to have their designation upgraded to a Canadian Certified Professional Ergonomist (CCPE). There are a few consultants in Canada that hold this designation.

Are Occupational Therapists qualified to work in the field of ergonomics?

Yes. *Occupational Therapists* have academic and practical training in the study of ergonomic principles in the Master of Occupational Therapy training. One of occupational therapy's theoretical approaches focuses on how people relate to their environments and the work that they do. As well, occupational therapists are trained extensively in the process of disability and rehabilitation, assisting to remove barriers to function for people with physical and/or mental disabilities in the workplace. In addition to foundational training, occupational therapists may take continuing education courses to become more qualified in the practice of ergonomics once they are registered to work as an occupational therapist.

How do I find an Occupational Therapist with ergonomics experience or a Certified Ergonomist?

Occupational Therapists in Manitoba with interest and training in ergonomics are listed on the Manitoba Society of Occupational Therapists Private Practice Directory:

<http://www.msot.mb.ca/uploads/COMPLETE%20PPD%202013-2014.pdf>

Certified Ergonomic consultants are listed on the Association of Canadian Ergonomists website:

<http://www.ace-ergocanada.ca/index.php?command=buildBlock&contentid=182>

How can I learn more about the other services that an occupational therapist can provide in the workplace?

Occupational Therapists assist workplaces to minimize injuries, reduce costs associated with lost time and assist employees in safe, effective return to work interventions. For further ideas about the services that Occupational Therapists may provide, check out the ***OT in the Workplace*** information on the Manitoba Society of Occupational Therapists website:

http://www.msot.mb.ca/find_an_occupational_therapist.aspx