

THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN IMPROVING SELF-CARE AND ACTIVITY LEVELS IN PATIENTS WITH COPD

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Abstract: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a progressive respiratory condition that significantly impacts patients' physical function and ability to perform daily activities. Occupational therapy (OT) plays a critical role in enhancing self-care, improving activity levels, and promoting independence among individuals with COPD. This study reviews current evidence on the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions, including energy conservation techniques, adaptive strategies, and activity pacing, in improving patients' quality of life. OT interventions have been shown to reduce fatigue, enhance functional capacity, and support patients in managing daily tasks more effectively. By addressing both physical limitations and psychosocial factors, occupational therapy contributes to improved autonomy and overall well-being in COPD patients.

Keywords: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Occupational Therapy, Self-Care, Daily Activities, Functional Independence, Energy Conservation, Activity Management.

Introduction

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a progressive respiratory disorder characterized by persistent airflow limitation, chronic cough, and shortness of breath. It is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, significantly impacting patients' physical function, quality of life, and ability to perform daily activities. COPD not only affects lung function but also contributes to fatigue, reduced endurance, and decreased participation in routine tasks, which can lead to dependency and social isolation.

Occupational therapy (OT) plays a vital role in addressing these challenges by helping patients maintain independence and improve functional capacity. OT interventions focus on promoting self-care, optimizing daily activities, and managing energy expenditure to reduce fatigue. Techniques such as activity pacing, environmental modifications, adaptive equipment, and exercise programs are tailored to individual needs to enhance both physical performance and psychosocial well-being.

This paper aims to explore the role of occupational therapy in improving self-care abilities and activity levels among patients with COPD. By reviewing current research and clinical practices, it highlights the effectiveness of OT interventions in enhancing functional independence, promoting participation in daily life, and improving overall quality of life for COPD patients.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a progressive respiratory disorder characterized by persistent airflow limitation, chronic cough, and shortness of breath. It is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, significantly affecting patients' physical function, quality of life, and ability to perform daily activities. COPD not only impairs lung function but also contributes to fatigue, reduced endurance, and limitations in performing routine tasks, which can lead to increased dependency and social isolation. Patients often struggle with activities such as dressing, cooking, personal hygiene, and mobility, which can negatively impact both physical and mental health.

Occupational therapy (OT) has emerged as a crucial intervention to address these challenges. OT focuses on promoting functional independence, enhancing self-care, and improving participation in daily activities through personalized strategies. Key interventions include energy conservation techniques, task simplification, adaptive equipment, and environmental modifications. Additionally, OT programs often incorporate breathing exercises, endurance training, and psychosocial support to help patients manage fatigue, anxiety, and depression associated with chronic illness.

The integration of occupational therapy into the management of COPD provides a holistic approach that targets both physical and psychosocial needs. By improving patients' ability to perform daily activities, OT not only enhances functional capacity but also promotes self-efficacy, autonomy, and overall quality of life.

This paper aims to explore the role and effectiveness of occupational therapy in improving self-care and activity levels among patients with COPD. It examines evidence-based interventions, highlights best practices, and emphasizes the importance of individualized treatment plans to optimize outcomes for patients living with this chronic condition.

Main body

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) significantly affects patients' ability to perform daily activities, often leading to decreased independence. Difficulties in personal hygiene, dressing, cooking, cleaning, and mobility are common, while fatigue, shortness of breath, and reduced physical endurance further limit functional capacity, resulting in dependence on caregivers or family members. Reduced participation in daily activities can negatively impact mental health, increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, and social isolation, which highlights the necessity of interventions targeting activity levels and self-care abilities. Occupational therapy (OT) plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges by enabling patients to perform meaningful daily activities despite physical limitations. In the management of COPD, OT interventions are tailored to individual needs and include strategies such as energy conservation techniques, task simplification, pacing, adaptive equipment, environmental modifications, and exercise programs. Energy conservation techniques teach patients how to prioritize activities, take rest breaks, and distribute energy throughout the day, reducing fatigue and increasing endurance. Task simplification and pacing break down complex activities into smaller, manageable steps, allowing patients to complete tasks efficiently without overexertion. Adaptive tools, such as reachers, long-handled sponges, shower chairs, and ergonomic kitchen utensils, help maintain independence and safety, while environmental modifications, including rearranging furniture, installing grab bars, and improving lighting, facilitate easier and safer movement. Exercise and breathing programs incorporated into OT enhance physical endurance, reduce shortness of breath, and improve overall functional capacity.

Through these interventions, occupational therapy significantly improves functional independence, allowing patients to perform essential self-care tasks such as personal hygiene, meal preparation, and household activities without heavy reliance on others. Enhanced independence not only promotes physical health but also boosts self-esteem, motivation, and overall quality of life. COPD often leads to a sedentary lifestyle, which exacerbates physical decline and social withdrawal; therefore, OT encourages participation in meaningful activities tailored to patients' interests, including hobbies, light exercise, or social engagement. Engagement in purposeful activities improves physical endurance and mental well-being, reduces fatigue, and promotes adherence to treatment plans, thereby maintaining activity levels and preventing functional decline. Beyond physical improvements, occupational therapy offers psychosocial benefits by enhancing patients' sense of autonomy and control over their daily lives, reducing feelings of helplessness and depression. Group or community-based OT programs provide social interaction, peer support, and motivation, further improving mental health outcomes for COPD patients.

Evidence supports the effectiveness of occupational therapy in improving self-care abilities and activity levels among COPD patients. Studies indicate that patients receiving OT interventions report reduced fatigue, better task management, increased participation in daily activities, and improved quality of life. Integration of OT into multidisciplinary COPD management programs addresses both physical limitations and psychosocial challenges effectively. In clinical practice, occupational therapists collaborate with physicians, physiotherapists, and nurses to design comprehensive, individualized care plans. Regular assessment of functional abilities, goal setting, and progress monitoring ensures interventions remain relevant and effective, while education of patients and caregivers on energy conservation, activity pacing, and adaptive strategies is essential for sustaining long-term benefits. Through this holistic approach, occupational therapy contributes significantly to improving the independence, activity levels, and overall well-being of patients living with COPD.

Conclusion

Occupational therapy plays a vital role in improving self-care and activity levels in patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). By addressing both physical limitations and psychosocial challenges, OT enables patients to maintain independence, perform daily activities more efficiently, and engage in meaningful life activities. Interventions such as energy conservation techniques, task pacing, adaptive equipment, environmental modifications, and exercise programs significantly enhance functional capacity, reduce fatigue, and improve quality of life. Moreover, OT fosters a sense of autonomy, boosts self-esteem, and promotes mental well-being, helping patients overcome the psychological burdens associated with chronic illness. Evidence consistently demonstrates that incorporating occupational therapy into multidisciplinary COPD management programs leads to better overall outcomes, including improved daily functioning, greater participation in activities, and enhanced patient satisfaction. Ultimately, occupational therapy is an essential component of comprehensive care for COPD patients, supporting both physical and psychosocial health, and enabling individuals to lead more independent and fulfilling lives.

Occupational therapy plays a vital role in improving self-care and activity levels in patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). By addressing both physical limitations and psychosocial challenges, OT enables patients to maintain independence, perform daily activities more efficiently, and engage in meaningful life activities. Interventions such as energy conservation techniques, task pacing, adaptive equipment, environmental modifications, and exercise programs significantly enhance functional capacity, reduce fatigue, and improve quality of life. Moreover, OT fosters a sense of autonomy, boosts self-esteem, and promotes mental well-being, helping patients overcome the psychological burdens associated with chronic illness. Evidence consistently demonstrates that incorporating occupational therapy into multidisciplinary COPD management programs leads to better overall outcomes, including improved daily functioning, greater participation in activities, and enhanced patient satisfaction.

In addition, occupational therapy contributes to long-term management of COPD by teaching patients strategies to conserve energy, adapt their environments, and pace their activities, which helps prevent deterioration in functional abilities and reduces the risk of hospitalizations. OT also encourages patients to maintain regular physical activity and engage in social interactions, which are essential for sustaining both physical health and mental resilience. By supporting patients in developing problem-solving skills and self-management strategies, occupational therapy empowers individuals to take an active role in their own care, fostering confidence and independence. Overall, occupational therapy is an indispensable component of comprehensive care for COPD patients, not only improving immediate functional outcomes but also promoting long-term autonomy, participation, and quality of life.

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