



**COOKING WITH
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

www.cookingwithoccupationaltherapy.com

By: Melissa Alley, OTS

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

What is occupational therapy? Occupational therapy, often referred to as OT, is a holistic practice designed to help people restore their ability to participate in meaningful activities or occupations. For example, after people have had injuries or illnesses, such as a stroke, traumatic brain injury, arthritis or any other debilitating disease, they often aren't able to do activities that they used to do, such as cooking. In this example, an OT would help the person regain the skills necessary to get back to cooking. Cooking is considered an instrumental activity of daily living (IADL). That means having the ability to cook allows people to live independently.

WHY COOKING?

Cooking is such a great activity to do with clients in an occupational therapy session! Why? Because being able to cook gives people their independence back. Not only that, but cooking and eating is often a huge part of people's social interaction. Think about all the holidays and special occasions spent around the kitchen table! When cooking in occupational therapy sessions it's possible to work on lots of performance components in one session. Also, dynamic movement naturally occurs, so the occupational therapist (OT) is able to address dysfunctional motor patterns in a real life situation. This website offers suggestions on how to work on performance components while cooking, easy to do recipes and tips and tricks for the OT. Enjoy!

MELISSA ALLEY, OTS

I'm a second year student in the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program at Milligan College. Every year, students in the program complete an expo project, which is a capstone project that combines what we've learned in the classroom with real life occupational therapy (OT). I decided that I wanted to combine my love for cooking with my passion for OT. I also wanted to work with an underserved population. So, I reached out to Dawn of Hope, a local non-profit that provides services to people with intellectual disabilities. There I taught cooking classes with a focus on helping people improve their functional mobility. That experience combined with what I've learned in the classroom has helped to make this website possible.

PERFORMANCE COMPONENTS

Here are some ways OTs can work on performance components while cooking in an OT intervention. I've included photos, videos and a brief description of what I was doing while working with the clients. See the recipe page for the recipes I used during these intervention sessions.



GRASP PATTERN & WRIST EXTENSION

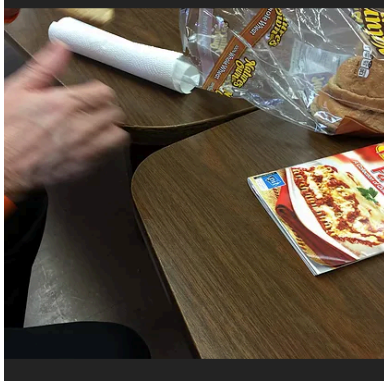
This client had a digital pronate grasp, which helped her to scoop out the pizza sauce. In the photo her wrist was in flexion, and I worked hand over hand with her to try to get her wrist into extension. I didn't get a photo of this, but she was able to do wrist extension. She did, however, keep going back into flexion.



GRASP PATTERN

When putting the cheese on the pizza, we were able to work on grasp patterns. We worked on using a lateral pinch grasp pattern when holding the bag of cheese open. When picking up a handful of cheese, we worked on using thumb abduction and when picking up one single piece of cheese we worked on using a pincer grasp. She had a difficult time with the pincer grasp, and she probably ended up trying over twenty times before she got it. She didn't seem upset, so I let her keep trying until she was successful.





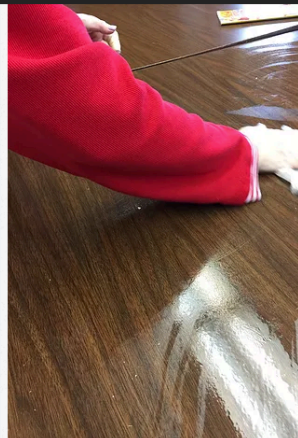
PROBLEM SOLVING

Sometimes problems naturally come up when cooking. His paper towel kept rolling up so, we talked about how he could get that to stop happening. He came up with the idea of setting the magazine on the edge of his paper towel to keep it down.



REACH

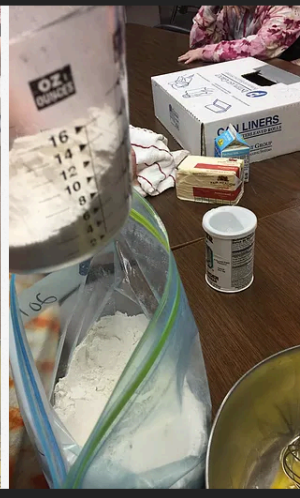
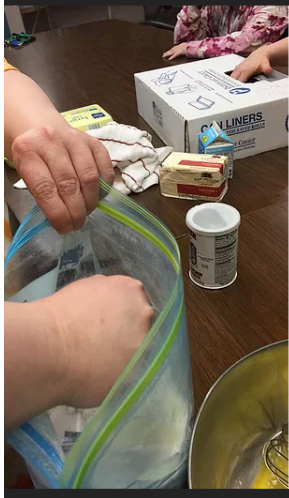
Cleaning up from cooking is a great way to work on more performance components. This lady is working on reach. She has difficulty standing, but she really wanted to clean up the side of the table that was opposite from her, so she stood up and reached as far as she could to wipe down the table. This worked on postural control and stability while standing.



Pressure Discrimination

She worked on pressure discrimination when she was cracking the egg. It took her a number of times of hitting the edge of the bowl with the egg before she got the egg to crack. Pressure discrimination is a sensory performance component.





Recognition

Recognition is a cognitive performance component. She was trying to measure out two cups of the flour. I showed her where the two cup line was on the measuring cup before she started, but she still had trouble with getting the right amount of flour in the cup. First she had too little then she had too much. So, I worked with her on recognizing where the two cup line is and getting the right amount of flour in the cup.



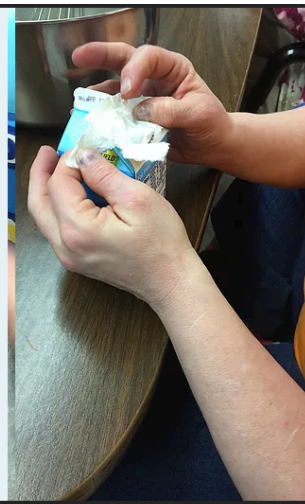
Hand Eye Coordination

He worked on hand eye coordination when he was whisking the egg. You can tell from the video that his movements aren't smooth and coordinated, so this was good practice for him.



Self Efficacy & Problem Solving

She worked on opening this milk carton for about five minutes before she was able to get it open. You can see she had trouble with the layers of paper peeling away. She handed me the carton to have me open it, but I encouraged her to keep going. You can tell from the last picture that because of her persistence, she was able to open the carton on her own. This also worked on increasing her self efficacy.



Forearm Pronation & Supination



When turning the pancake, she worked on forearm pronation and supination. Along with that, she also worked on getting her timing and coordination right, in order to successfully flip the pancake. Not everyone was able to do this. Some people had to try more than once, and some people watched others do it first before they were able to do.



Hand Eye Coordination & Fine Motor Movements



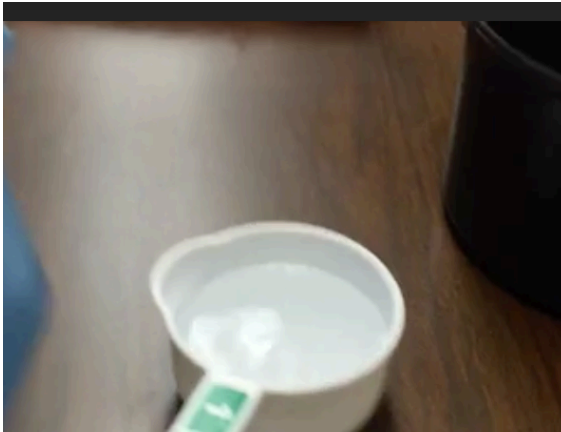
She struggled with keeping the measuring cup level. You can see in the first video that the water spilled on the table when she tried pouring it in the bowl. With some practice, she was able to keep the measuring cup level, and in the second video she was able to pour the water in the bowl without spilling it.



Recognition



He had trouble filling the measuring cup all the way full with water. You can see in the video he filled it about 3/4 full and needed verbal prompting to continue filling it. As we continued to cook, with some cueing he began to recognize when the measuring cup was appropriately filled to the top.



In-hand Manipulation



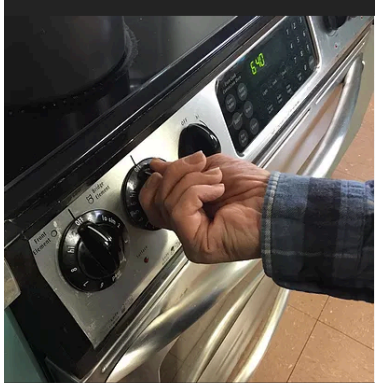
He used in-hand manipulation to tie the string on the tea bags together. He had trouble making a knot when he started, but with some encouragement he kept trying. He was able to make the knot with two bags and added a second knot with the third bag of tea.



Hand Washing



Another skill that's great to incorporate before you start cooking is hand washing. This is a great time to teach client's hand washing techniques and make sure they're doing it appropriately.



Turning the Burner On



We worked on the skill of turning the burner on. This gentleman didn't know how to work the knob. On this stove, you had to push the knob in before you could turn it, so I taught him how to do that by telling him and demonstrating.

Crossing the midline



He worked on crossing the midline when moving the cookies from the cookie sheet pan to the plate. Crossing the midline helps build neural pathways in the brain and is a prerequisite for development of motor and cognitive skills.



Bilateral Integration



Putting the cookies into the oven and getting them out of the oven works on bilateral integration. Bilateral integration is being able to use both sides of the body together in a coordinated fashion. He had good bilateral integration with this activity, but struggled with it with other activities.



Spacing



He struggled with putting the cookies on the baking sheet with the appropriate amount of even space between each cookie. I worked on teaching him that if they aren't spaced out evenly they will all bake together and make one big cookie.



RECIPES

Here are some easy to use recipes your client can easily make during OT cooking interventions. These are great because they don't require a lot of ingredients and they're relatively simple to make. See the performance components page for ideas on how to use these recipes while working with a client.

Personal Pizza

Ingredients

- Hamburger buns
- Pizza sauce
- Mozzarella cheese
- Pepperoni

Preheat the oven to 350°. Spread pizza sauce on hamburger bun. Put cheese on sauce and place pepperoni on top. Bake for about 12-15 minutes or until done.



Pancakes

Ingredients

- 1 egg
- 1 C flour
- 3/4 C milk
- 2 tbsp. oil
- 3 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt

Whisk egg. Add other ingredients. Whisk until mixed, don't over mix. Ladle on preheated skillet. Flip pancake after it gets a lot of bubbles. It doesn't take long for the second side to cook.



Sweet Tea

Ingredients

- 6 black tea bags
- 8 cups of water
- 1 cup of sugar

Boil 4 cups of water. Turn off heat and add six tea bags. Cover and let steep for 5 minutes. Stir in one cup of sugar. Add remaining 4 cups of water. Cool in refrigerator before serving.



Couscous

Ingredients

- 1/2 an onion
- 1 T oil
- 1 box of couscous mix
- Water

Chop the onion. Put oil in pan. Using medium heat pan fry onion until soft. Add water according to box directions. Boil. Add seasoning packet and couscous. Turn off heat and let sit for five minutes until water is absorbed.



Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients

- 1 chocolate chip cookie mix
- 1 stick of melted butter
- 1 egg

Melt butter and mix with egg in mixing bowl. Add cookie mix. Stir till mixed. Place scoops on cookie sheet. Bake at 350° for 8-10 minutes until cooked.





- Ask the client if they normally sit or stand when cooking and do whichever one they normally do.
- If they stand, make sure their feet are pointing forward before they start cooking. This will help with postural alignment. It will also help to prevent falls.
- If the client is a fall risk, position them with their knees in front of a solid surface such as a cupboard. Also, place a chair behind them and stand on their weak side when assisting them.
- Do hand over hand assists, as opposed to assisting from across the client. This way you will be able to feel what they are feeling and it will help get their hand in the appropriate position.
- When cutting, make sure the cutting board won't slip. One way to do this is to place dycem under the board. If you don't have dycem, another way to get grip is to place a wet cloth between the cutting board and work surface.
- Cooking is a great way to incorporate other activities of daily living (ADL) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADL). Start with washing hands before cooking and have the client participate in cleaning up the mess from cooking.



Adaptive equipment is often used to help people regain function. There's a lot of adaptive equipment devices out there. Below are just some examples of adaptive equipment that can be used when cooking or eating, to give you an idea of what's available. Be sure to consult an OT when deciding on what would be best to use in a specific situation.



Built-up handle

The built-up handle makes it easier for people with weak grip strength to hold the utensil.



Universal Cuff

The universal cuff is a cuff that straps to the palm of the hand with a pouch. An eating utensil can be put in the pouch, so someone with weak grip strength can feed themselves. Many other items such as toothbrush, pen or stylus can be used with the cuff.



Adaptive Cutting Board

This cutting board can be used to help hold the food items in place while the person cuts. This is useful for someone that only has one functioning hand. Another feature of some adaptive equipment cutting boards is that they have suction cups on the bottom of them. This helps them stay in place while the person is cutting. Another option for that is to place a damp towel under the cutting board. This will also help to keep the cutting board from slipping.



Knob Turner

This knob turner is a good option for people who have weak finger strength and dexterity. With this device, the individual can use their arm strength to turn a stove or microwave knob.



Rocker Knife

A rocker knife is designed to allow for easy cutting for people with a weak grasp. It allows for people to cut food items using a rocking motion. Also, the handle design changes how the wrist functions when cutting, making it easier for some people to cut.



Pan Holder

This pan holder keeps the pan stable on the stove when the person is stirring. It makes it so someone with only one functioning hand can safely stir the food without the whole pan spilling off the stove.