



Therapy Without Borders! Therapeutic Tasks In The Home and Community

Good news.... any task can be therapeutic!! The key to making a task therapeutic is making the task intentional. This means look at the skill you would like to improve and then incorporate this into an activity. It may take you longer to do an activity with this intentionality, but the outcome will be well worth the patience. For example, if there are coordination deficits and weakness in the right hand, then use the right hand as much as possible instead of placing the hand aside as if it's on vacation. Below we will discuss how ordinary activities that we do day to day can actually be therapeutic.

- **Laundry:** Who doesn't love laundry??? To address balance, stand in front of the washer with assistance as needed and place the clothes in the tub. Then measure amount of detergent needed which can be placed in strategic places to encourage reaching (UE range of motion), focus for measuring, and then pouring into washer. Set a timer or work on memory skills to recognize when washer finished and ready for the dryer. When they are dry, stand or sit to fold them depending on skills you want to improve. Using both hands to fold even if one is weak is great at encouraging bilateral UE skills as well as visual scanning. Then put the clothes away for visual memory and further reaching and balance.
- **Vacuuming/ sweeping;** If balance allows, stand to sweep or vacuum with someone providing assist for balance if needed. This improves balance, range of motion, visual scanning.
- **Cleaning counters:** Wiping counters can be great for people with UE weakness or range of motion limitations. Spray the counter, then wipe with your weak UE or use the stronger arm to help the more limited arm. Stand to address balance and then reach out as far as you can. For those with neglect, encourage wiping to the "missing" side.

- **Arranging cabinets:** Who's cabinets do not need rearranging?? This is a great therapeutic activity and productive one too! Stand to address balance deficits with support provided as needed. With the weaker arm, reach into the cabinet and retrieve various items. Provide assistance to the weaker arm if needed to avoid dropping items or help with achieving maximal range of motion. You can make this more challenging by calling out specific item to locate to address scanning or ask the person to name the object they are retrieving if working on language skills. You can also make this into a memory game by asking to retrieve 3 items such as the pepper, rosemary, and sugar.
- **Emptying dishwasher:** This can be done seated or standing. Addresses memory and recall for where the items need to be put away. Sorting silverware also good and this can be done anytime to address coordination, scanning, etc.
- **Washing dishes:** Incorporates bilateral hand skills and different textures of warm water, suds, and brushes. Also balance tasks if performing standing or seated working on trunk control.
- **Making bed:** Great balance activity and problem solving how to place sheets on the bed, etc.
- **Meal prep:** Make sure you are encouraging and allowing the person to assist with meal prep as much as possible. This can be helping to measure, stir, cut (if safe) or any components and can be done while standing at the counter or seated. Begin with simple tasks and then progress to more difficult. A first step would be have items presented on the counter and then ask the person to make a sandwich. Then progress to locating the items in the cabinets and refrigerator and putting the items away when completed addressing memory skills. If someone has difficulty naming objects, then practice this skill throughout the task you are performing. This can be progressed to looking up recipes and following step by step instructions.

This is just a short list but household responsibilities go on and on! When someone is home "recovering" make sure they are involved and feel purposeful! Doing everything for someone you love is actually causing more dependency and robbing them of a chance for greater independence!

Functional tasks in the home address many areas! This includes range of motion, visual perceptual skills, strengthening, communication skills, balance, and cognition. The key to recovery is **active engagement** in all of the day to day activities that were performed prior to the injury. The activities can be performed to intentionally address the areas that have been affected by the brain injury. If there is an impairment with weakness or range of motion, make sure that side is allowed to do the work for reaching, grasping, etc. Many times caregivers are required to facilitate further recovery when their loved one is discharged home and it is important to provide opportunities for success and activity.

IADL (Instrumental activities of daily living) activities: These daily tasks that were once taken for granted involve many skills from various parts of the brain including sequencing, functional cognition, attention, physical performance, balance, and general strength.

Community Integration Skills

Get your loved one out in the community as much as possible! This may require more planning now as it once did, but it will be worth the benefits. Outings are very therapeutic and can address many skills such as balance, safety, strengthening, coordination, etc. Here are some examples listed below:

- **Grocery shopping**- this is necessary in all households and what better way to get someone out is going with you! If they are in a wheelchair, encourage them to propel as much as possible and give them a list with a few items or many depending on the person and encourage them to help you shop. Encourage them to reach out with their “weaker” side if possible even if you are providing hand over hand support for success. Prior to shopping, prepare a list of needed items by going through cabinets then write the list. Pre planning is also an important task to incorporate. For checking out, encourage them to place items on the counter and help with the check out process through payment and conversation.
- **Gym:** It is beneficial to maintain an exercise routine of at least 3 days a week. The gym is a therapeutic tool that many clients have accessible to them. Aquatic therapy may also be considered and most local YMCA’s have indoor pools with ramps or lifts.

- **Library:** use the computer to search for books of interest. Narrow the selection of books down and ask to find a specific title or topic. Locating the section and books can be graded to be easier or harder depending on the goal. Choose an audio book to accompany a book to provide auditory feedback while reading is attempted.
- **Lowe's home improvement:** Pick a project of interest such as gardening, building, etc and purchase items. You can also design a scavenger hunt of items in the store.
- **Mall:** shop in stores of interest. Using the directory to "map" out the route to the store you would like to visit.
- **Food Court:** This is good to help with food selection, ordering (make sure you allow the person to speak up and not speak for them. You can also practice money management and budgeting.
- **Therapeutic volunteer work:** Suggestions include Habitat Restore, thrift stores, Kramden institute (rebuilding computers for donation), SPCA or really any place of interest! Tasks can be "graded" to accommodate the goals and skill level of the person recovering from the brain injury, ranging from wiping down counters to putting together ceiling fans.