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THIS YEAR, MAKE RESOLUTIONS RESEARCH SHOWS YOU CAN KEEP

*Occupational Therapy Practitioners Help Individuals of All Ages
Accomplish New Year's Resolutions*

Bethesda, MD — Approximately 50 percent of individuals make at least one New Year's resolution each year. However, research suggests a third of these resolutions are dropped within the first week, and less than a quarter survive the six-month point. So, how can you make a New Year's resolution that will stand the test of time? The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) says resolutions rooted in research-based occupational therapy practices are the most likely to be successful.

"Occupational therapy is a scientifically-driven, evidence-based profession that enables people of all ages live life to its fullest by helping them prevent—or live better regardless of—injury, illness or chronic disability. This is accomplished through designing strategies for everyday living and customizing environments to develop and maximize potential," said AOTA president Penelope Moyers Cleveland, EdD, OTR/L, BCMH, FAOTA.

"By taking the full picture into account—a person's psychological, physical, emotional, and social make-up—occupational therapy assists people in achieving their goals, functioning at the highest possible level, concentrating on what matters most to them, maintaining or rebuilding their independence, and participating in the everyday activities that they need to do or that simply make life worth living," she continued. "So, when developing your New Year's resolutions, put on your 'occupational therapy hat,' and keep your goals clear and appropriate to your lifestyle and circumstances. Set achievable milestones to keep you motivated throughout the year, and keep the resolutions sensible and straightforward."

Examples of achievable New Year's resolutions, broken down by age range, from AOTA include:

Under 20

- **Reduce the stress of homework.** As students go back to school after holiday break, there's no need to return to previous homework struggles. Research has shown that parents should provide a consistent environment where homework is completed. Doing homework in a different place every day or in cluttered spaces doesn't provide much-needed order and structure. Additionally, research has shown that multitasking doesn't save time because you're more likely to make a mistake or forget something. So, get rid of unnecessary distractions.
- **Get more sleep on a regular basis.** Sleep is essential for mental alertness and peak performance. According to the National Sleep Foundation, children who get an optimal amount of sleep are less apt to display behavioral issues. Analyze the context of children's or teenagers' sleep—what goes on before bedtime is critical. Good sleep habits include avoiding caffeine intake and limiting electronic use, such as TV and the computer, near bedtimes.

Ages 20 to 40

- **Organize living spaces.** Research has shown that clutter leads to dust and mold collection, increases risks of falls by narrowing pathways and poses potential fire hazards. Organizing cabinets, desks closets and work areas helps to keep items accessible. Examine things like rushed schedules that can lead to creating clutter, rather than just looking at the clutter itself.
- **Make family dinnertime a priority.** Dinnertime provides a unique opportunity for family togetherness. Research has shown that teens who rarely eat dinner with their families are 3.5 times more likely to abuse prescription drugs than their counterparts who frequently eat family dinners. Open channels of communication by introducing topics at dinnertime for family discussion to help children learn calm and easy ways to share their successes and problems.

Ages 40 to 60

- **Increase physical activity.** Sixty-five percent of American adults are overweight, and obesity is the leading modifiable risk factor contributing to early mortality and many diseases and disorders. Examine your routines that inhibit activity. Think of something that has meaning for you and link it to the activity. Are you a social person who would want to walk with a friend instead of sitting for a phone conversation? If you like technology, then try the Wii Fit to get you off the couch.
- **Take care of the caregiver.** Caring for an older adult can be rewarding and fulfilling but can also place great physical, emotional and financial demands on those who take care of them. Research has shown that caregivers age between four and eight years faster than non-caregivers. Occupational therapists recommend caregivers join a therapy or discussion group, share the caring responsibility, develop a schedule that distributes caregiving responsibility and create moments of joy throughout the day by participating in activities you enjoy.

Ages 60 to 80

- **Modify my home to make it more livable.** While most people want to stay in their homes as long as possible, only a small percentage make changes in their home environments allowing safety and independence. Research has shown that removing environmental barriers in the homes of older adults improves their ability to do routine activities in the home. Changes can be small—like adding lever-style door handles—or large—such as creating a zero-step entrance or adding or converting space on the main floor for a bedroom and accessible bathroom.
- **Take up gardening again.** Gardening, America's number-one outdoor leisure activity, can be difficult if a person has health conditions that limit movement or stamina. But, there are ways to decrease the aches, pains and strains that often occur during gardening. Research has shown that protecting your joints, sitting while working, limiting lifting, starting in a small area and varying your tasks make gardening easier and more comfortable.

Over 80

- **Stay safe behind the wheel.** Although many older adults modify their driving habits as they age by driving less often—choosing to limit trips to daylight hours or residential areas, and avoiding unprotected left turns—make a resolution to learn about strategies that may work for you. **Consult an occupational therapist** or take a class in safe driving. There are alternatives to losing driving privileges. Considering safe driving habits along with ensuring your access to public and private transit alternatives may prolong a lifestyle of independence and choice.
- **Make the most of my remaining eyesight.** Low vision can cause difficulty in seeing detailed letters and numbers when reading; recognizing the slope of a curb, steps or facial features; and distinguishing between similar colors, such as black and blue. Adults who have these problems may have trouble maintaining their independence and completing typical day-to-day activities. Research has shown that there are four major age-related eye diseases—glaucoma, cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy—that affect seniors. But, compensations for vision loss can be designed by occupational therapists, including making modification in the environment, training in low vision techniques and the use of devices to enhance safety and independence.

Draft your own occupational therapy-based New Year's resolution for a chance to win a personal goal plan from an occupational therapy practitioner. To enter, send your resolution, full name, age, address (including city, state and zip code), daytime phone number and e-mail address to resolutions@aota.org by 11:59 p.m. ET on December 31, 2008. The winner will be contacted by Monday, January 5, 2008.

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)** represents the interests and concerns of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditation and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA's major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.