

PERSONAL MESSAGE

What can a Certified Hand Therapist do for you?

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In this magazine you will receive real-world help and information that can lead to less pain and better function and performance in the use of your hands and upper extremities.

Hands are used for all tasks at home, work or in leisure activities. As I'm sure you'll agree, they are extremely valuable. Any pain or loss of function in a hand, arm or shoulder can devastate a person's life. Hand pain can cause a person to stop using one hand correctly and overwork the opposite hand. If a person begins to use his arm differently because of hand pain, it can lead to wrist and shoulder pain.

A Certified Hand Therapist is part of an exceptional group of Occupational Therapists or Physical Therapists who have a minimum of five years of clinical experience, including 2000 hours or more of direct practice in hand therapy. In addition, the Certified Hand Therapist must successfully pass a comprehensive test of advanced clinical skills and theory in upper extremity rehabilitation. When fully certified, the therapist is allowed to put CHT after his name. This distinguishes an occupational therapist or physical therapist as someone with the highest professional credential in the specialty of upper extremity rehabilitation.

Having met the standards set by the Hand Therapy Certification Commission, the Certified Hand Therapist can offer the public assurance that the treating therapist has achieved the highest level of competency in the profession and stays current in the field of upper extremity rehabilitation. Certification is voluntary and difficult to attain, requiring advanced studying and training.

The anatomy of the hand is intricate. Surgery on the upper extremity is often very delicate



*Erin Duffy, OTR/L, CHT and Cathy Elvins, OTR/L, CHT
NW Hand Therapy*

using microscopic techniques. The technical complexity of this type of surgery necessitates a high level of competence during the postoperative recovery by a therapist with advanced skills in upper extremity rehabilitation. The hand therapist is also highly skilled in custom splinting techniques to help the patient achieve the highest level of function.

Using specialized skills in assessment of pain, swelling, loss of motion or strength, the therapist can determine the appropriate course of treatment. The hand therapist is skilled in assessing nerve changes, such as numbness and tingling, to determine the need for splinting and ergonomic changes at work or home. The primary goal of therapy is to restore to the patient a pain-free, functional hand allowing them to participate in the work and leisure activities that they enjoy. A certified Hand Therapist is recognized by many professional organizations as a benchmark for excellence in upper extremity rehabilitation.

“If my hands hurt...”

Proper treatment at the right time limits pain, discomfort and decreased function. Do not ignore negative feelings in your hands! Investigate and get professional advice as soon as possible.

“If my hands hurt, I must have carpal tunnel” is a common statement that we as hand therapists often hear. Because carpal tunnel is the “diagnosis of the week,” many people assume that is what they have if the hands hurt. But there are many reasons why a person may have hand pain. Pain generally occurs from 2 major sources: disease or trauma. Some of the most common hand diseases include rheumatoid arthritis and Dupuytren’s Disease. Pain to the hands can be acute, such as slamming your hand in a door, or chronic, when it occurs from overuse or poor sleeping postures.

There are four major areas of the body which pain and discomfort can arise from; nerve irritation as in carpal tunnel, muscle or tendon problems such as tendinitis, ligament damage as in sprain or strains, or inflamed joints as in arthritis. A physician makes the specific diagnosis. The physician making the diagnosis could be a hand surgeon, orthopedic surgeon or a neurologist. The physician does a history, physical exam and specialized tests to make the appropriate diagnosis of the condition. During the physical exam, the doctor may perform tests which include checking range of motion, Tinel’s Test (tapping on the wrist, causes an electrical shock or tingling feeling), Phalen’s Test (holding the wrist bent to see the reaction of the nerve), strength test, or a sensory test. The patient may be sent for more specialized tests based on the physical findings. These tests may include electrical myogram and nerve conduction test (placing needles in the muscles and nerves to determine how they are working), x-rays to check the bones and MRI or CT scan to check soft tissue). There are many other tests that can be ordered if these common tests do not uncover the reason for the pain. With this information the doctor will make the diagnosis and recommend treatment options.

Carpal tunnel is a common problem associated with computer work and repetitive work. The first and most common complaint of carpal tunnel is generally numbness and tingling and occasionally pain in the hand especially the thumb side of the hand and especially at night. When the numbness wakes up the person or

numbness and pain are present when the person wakes up, it is time to see a professional. Carpal tunnel is a compression of the median nerve near the wrist. If left untreated, it can cause permanent nerve damage.

Treatment begins conservatively with a splint, cortisone injections, and anti-inflammatory medications. The splint is used first at night, but may be used during daily activities if indicated by the therapist. It can be custom made by the therapist or prefabricated but fit by the therapist to make sure the wrist is resting at the correct angle and fits properly. The person may also have hand therapy prescribed for them. Hand therapy includes a thorough evaluation, including identifying possible causes of the compression of the nerve. Many people think that the only way to get carpal tunnel is by typing but there are many other factors and reasons why someone may develop it. How a person sleeps, drives, or does activities repetitively at home or work can all come into play. With the causes identified, modification can be made in the way a task is completed to minimize damaging forces. Exercises and stretching can also be done. If conservative treatment is not helpful, then surgery may be indicated.

There are many things that can cause pain in the hands. Osteoarthritis, which is a result of normal wear and tear of joints, can cause pain. It is a slow-progressing disease that primarily affects the hands and the large weight-bearing joints of the body, such as the knees and hips. The most common spot for this arthritis is the base of the thumb. This is most common in women over the age of forty. Thumb pain during normal activities; such as cooking, writing or holding things like keys or newspapers, are the most common complaints. A physician makes this diagnosis with an x-ray and may recommend anti-inflammatory medications and hand therapy. A custom splint is fabricated for the patient, which will protect the joint for damage while allowing the patient to use the hand. The patient will be provided with exercises to maintain range of motion and strength. Joint protection information will be provided to the patient in order for them to continue using their hands but in a non-harmful way.

A patient may also get enlarged knuckles or



bumps, which may be painful and limit movement. Custom splints designed for the exact problem that is presented by the patient are fabricated and modified as the joints improve.

Rheumatoid Arthritis also affects the hands. It is systemic meaning it affects many parts of the body, most commonly the larger joints such as wrists, elbows and hips.

Splinting, anti-inflammatory medication, exercises and joint protection education address the specific concerns of this type of arthritis and are very helpful.

Tendinitis and tenosynovitis of the muscles in the hand and forearm can also cause pain and discomfort. Tendinitis is inflammation of a tendon (the rope type structure that connects muscles to bones). It is most commonly seen in the wrist and fingers. When the tendons become irritated, they swell causing pain and discomfort with use.

Tenosynovitis is the inflammation of the lining of the tendon sheaths (the structure which enclose the tendons). The tendon sheath and the tendon can become inflamed simultaneously. The cause of tenosynovitis is usually strain, overuse, injury, or excessive exercise. One of most common areas to have this is the thumb and is called DeQuervain's Tenosynovitis or "washer women's syndrome" which at one time was caused by wringing out clothes. It may be caused by infant care or work done at the supermarket check out when scanning objects. Another common type of tenosynovitis is called a trigger finger or trigger thumb. With this condition the finger or thumb becomes locked bent and the patient must use the opposite hand to open the finger. This is caused when the tendon or tendon sheath becomes inflamed and thickened, preventing the smooth extension of the finger or thumb.

The treatment for any "itis" such as tendinitis and tenosynovitis is rest with custom-made splints, cortisone injections and anti-inflammatory medication. When symptoms of pain are decreased, exercises are given to improve function without symptoms returning. Education and how to avoid getting this again are very important.

Tennis Elbow, also known as Lateral Epicondylitis, is a common ailment, causing pain on the outside of the elbow. The forearm tendon is soft tissue that connects a muscle to bone. Because the muscles are constantly putting strain on the tendon they become inflamed or irritated. This inflammation is called tendinitis. Physical Therapy is very effective in treating tennis elbow, especially if the pain

is caught early. Tips for self management include rest from the irritating activity, ice for 15-20 minutes every 24 hours, and compressing the area with a compression bandage and elevation. In addition to the self management techniques physical therapy is recommended. Physical therapy will include specific techniques to alleviate pain and restore function. The use of special modalities such as ultrasound and iontophoresis may be used to assist in reducing pain and inflammation.

Trauma may cause pain to the hand or wrist. Wrist pain with bruising and swelling is a sign of an injury following trauma. The signs of a possible broken bone or fracture include pain, misshapen joints

and inability to move the wrist, hand, or a finger. If this happens it is important to seek medical attention immediately. If there are no misshapen joints, patients may wait to see if the pain may be from a sprain or a strain. A sprain and strain are both tears in the ligaments (tissue that connect bone to bone). The degree of damage to the ligament will determine if conservative treatment or surgery would be indicated. Splinting would play a major role in conservative treatment.

Most importantly, proper treatment at the right time limits pain, discomfort and decreased function. Do not ignore negative feelings in your hands! Investigate and get professional advice as soon as possible.

TIPS AND TRICKS TO PREVENT CARPAL TUNNEL

Being in good physical shape and eating healthy food will help the body respond to the stresses of repetitive movement and other abuses. This will increase blood flow to the muscles to aid the healing process.

Avoid repetitive wrist movements. Try to use larger muscle groups.

Pace work so that repetitive tasks and typing are interspersed with other types of tasks.

When you feel discomfort in your hands or arms, change how you are doing the task or stop the task and do some stretches before going back to the activity.



At Home:

Watch static postures of the wrist at any extreme position especially sleeping and driving.



Avoid repetitive wrist movements with hobbies and crafts such as wood working and needlepoint.

At Work:

Set up your workstation with the keyboard at a level where the elbows are bent at 90 or more and the wrists are straight.

Wrist rests are for resting, you should not keep the wrists resting on them when typing.

A negative tilt of the keyboard is helpful to

keep the wrist in a neutral position especially while resting during typing.

A "natural" or split keyboard is not essential but it can help some people, especially those with a large body.



FAQ

Is all hand pain Carpal Tunnel?

Many things including repetitive movements, trauma or disease can cause pain. A proper diagnosis is very important to determine the appropriate type of treatment.

Will my hand pain go away by itself?

Some pain will go away on its own, but other pain need definitive treatment, including anti-inflammatory medication and splinting.

Can arthritis be cured?

Arthritis is not “curable” but treatment can help decrease pain and inflammation and improve function. Custom designed splints can help prevent deformity and allow for more function.

What causes numbness and tingling?

Prolonged compression of the nerve will cause numbness and tingling as a signal that the nerve is in danger of being hurt and you should move your hands.

Should I avoid all activity that hurts my hands?

Activity is good for the joints; motion is like a lotion to the joints. You should change the way you do something if it causes pain, but not stop all activities (example: lifting a child from under the arms hurts the hands, change the way you lift to use the forearm). Some activities are impossible to avoid such as writing, but getting a better pen or taking mini-breaks will minimize pain.

Take this simple test...

Call your certified Hand Therapist if you:

| YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wake up with numbness or tingling. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have numbness or tingling that wakes you up. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Must stop an activity due to pain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Must take medication to help alleviate pain more than once per week. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stop doing hobbies or sports due to decreased function. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lose your grip and seem to be dropping more things than usual. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have pain when gripping things. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have been following self-care treatments for 2 weeks but still have pain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Your hand is swollen and it lasts more than 1 week. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have had a fall or trauma resulting in severe pain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Typing causes you pain or discomfort. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Your hand cramps after you write for a while. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Your hand feels achy and weak. |

Results:

Less than 3 Yes

You're doing fine. Exercising may help keep your hand in check.

Between 3 and 6 Yes

Hand Therapy could definitely be an option for you.

Between 6 and 10

We would advise you to see a doctor to get a better diagnosis, but Hand Therapy is definitely an option.



Simply place a check mark in the appropriate box. Once you are done, calculate the number of checks in the YES column and look at the results.

Featured Hand Therapist

Erin Duffy OTR/CHT

Erin Duffy is a Certified Hand Therapist and the first employee of Northwest Hand Therapy. After graduation from the University of Puget Sound in 1990 Erin began her career as an Occupational Therapist at Tacoma's St. Joseph Hospital. It was here that she began her focus on hand therapy.

Erin's interest in hand therapy is rooted in its scientific foundations and the measurability of the results. To this end she explores new and alternative treatment methods through her continuing education study. This study has allowed Erin to incorporate myofascial release and strain/counterstrain into her treatment options.

As a Certified Hand Therapist, Erin represents the elite in her field. To qualify for the exam a therapist must have 2,000 hours of experience. Only approximately 50% of the therapists who sit for the exam pass each year.

Erin and her husband, Kyle, live in Gig Harbor and enjoy the amenities and lifestyle there.



What's happening at our family of clinics....



Staff, NW Hand Therapy

Northwest Hand Therapy opened in 1998 in Tacoma with one therapist. It quickly added a second clinic in Gig Harbor. Northwest Hand therapists are highly trained professionals including two Certified Hand Therapists. Today the clinics provide comprehensive upper extremity treatment options including work demand simulation, complete splinting facilities, myofascial release, strain/counterstrain and movement impairment. The staff also provides injury prevention, joint protection and

ergonomic education. In addition to the state-of-the art equipment at both clinics, the Gig Harbor clinic recently moved into new facilities and added physical capacities exams to its offerings.

Tired of having **HAND PAIN?**



Come and Visit Us for a **FREE CONSULTATION**

Find out if Hand Therapy can help you ease the pain and improve your function and quality of life.

**Call us today at
(253) 851-7472**

**Visit us on the Internet at:
www.nwsportspt.com**



NW HAND THERAPY, INC.

GERMANY 2006: On to the World Cup! Bruce Snell and Dave Andrews of NW Sports Physical Therapy, Inc. have again been selected as the athletic trainers for the US Men's National Team. They are currently traveling with the team in preparation for the world's greatest sporting event, the 2006 World Cup. The team will make its headquarters in Hamburg, Germany. They begin play against

the Czech Republic on June 12th. Bruce and Dave are responsible for treating injuries, rehabilitation and nutrition/hydration for all the US World Cup stars. They will be keeping a journal of the tournament beginning with training camp in North Carolina in early May. Check out our web site for the updates, and Go USA!

WE CARE ABOUT YOU!

Call us today for a FREE consultation at

NW Sports Physical Therapy, Inc

Gig Harbor (253) 851-7472

Tacoma (253) 552-2525

NW Hand Therapy

Gig Harbor (253) 851-7472

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What can a Certified Hand Therapist do for you?

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