

Hand, Elbow, Wrist Pain

The hand is a wondrously complex structure of tiny bones, muscles, ligaments, and tendons which work together to perform tasks. The wrist and elbow are stabilizing joints that support the steady use of the hand and provide attachment points for the muscles that control the hand and wrist. All three of these areas are prone to injury from overuse or trauma. Their complexity requires the skills of an expert for proper rehabilitation from injury.

Some Hand, Wrist, and Elbow Issues Include:

Tennis/Golfer's Elbow: Tendonitis, or inflammation of the tendons, at the muscular attachments near the elbow. Symptoms typically include tenderness on the sides of the elbow, which increase with use of the wrist and hand, such as shaking hands or picking up a gallon of milk. Tendonitis responds well to therapy, using eccentric exercise, stretching, and various manual therapy techniques.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: Compression of the Median Nerve at the hand/base of your wrist. Symptoms include pain, numbness, and tingling of the first three fingers. The condition is well-known for waking people at night. Research supports the use of therapy, particularly in the early phase, for alleviation of the compression through stretching and activity modification. Research indicates that the longer symptoms are present before initiating treatment, the worse the outcome for therapy and surgical intervention due to underlying physiological changes of the nerve.

What can Physical or Occupational therapy do for Hand, Wrist, or Elbow pain?

Hand, wrist, and elbow injuries are commonly caused by trauma, such as a fall or overuse. Therapy works to determine the cause of the pain and reduces symptoms through education and ergonomic training. Frequently, workplace or hobby modification, in addition to a few simple exercises, can alleviate symptoms. For hand and wrist problems, the services of a Certified Hand Therapist (CHT) are HIGHLY RECOMMENDED. CHTs undergo extensive intensive training specific to the hand as the complexity of the area requires rigorous training beyond the training typical of a therapist.

Treatments for Hand, Wrist, and Elbow conditions:

Manual Therapy: Hands-on therapy, such as massage, is an effective tool and can usually be taught to be completed at home. Joint mobilization can increase mobility and alleviate pain, allowing better outcomes from exercise.

Exercise: Stretching and strengthening are used to improve mobility, strengthen and stabilize, and ward-off future issues.

Ultrasound: Ultrasonic waves are used for tissue healing and to break up scar tissue.

Fluidotherapy: A form of dry heat that warms tissues prior to exercise and manual therapy.

Paraffin Wax: Heated wax is used prior to exercise to increase blood flow and loosen the skin and surrounding tissues, allowing improved outcomes from exercise and hands-on therapy. This treatment is particularly effective for patients with hand arthritis.

Iontophoresis: The use of electrical stimulation to push anti-inflammatory medication through the skin, reducing the pain and inflammation of irritated tissues.