



A Physician's
Guide to
Hand Therapy

A Collaborative
Approach
to Quality
Patient Care

ASHT

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS

“WORKING WITH A KNOWLEDGEABLE HAND THERAPIST CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN COMPLEX HAND SURGICAL CASES. THE THERAPIST EXTENDS THE CONTINUUM OF OUR CARE AS WELL AS FUNCTIONING AS COACH AND TRAINER FOR OUR PATIENTS.”

- MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PRESIDENT,
AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND

Specialization of Care

A hand therapist is an occupational or physical therapist who, through advanced study, specializes in rehabilitating patients with conditions affecting the hands and upper quadrant. Additionally, certified hand therapists (CHTs), have a minimum of five years of clinical experience and have successfully passed an examination of advanced clinical skills and theory in upper extremity rehabilitation. (Source: Hand Therapy Certification Commission). This exam requires detailed knowledge of the anatomy and treatment of the upper quadrant.

As advances in surgical techniques and medicine have fostered greater understanding of the upper extremity, the need for specialized therapists to treat these injuries has become evident. These therapists' high degree of specialization requires continuing education specific to the treatment of hand and upper quadrant injuries. This training enables the hand therapist to work more effectively with patients, hastening their return to a productive lifestyle.

Patient Profiles

A hand therapist works with patients with a variety of upper extremity disorders, including tendon and nerve disorders and lacerations, fractures and dislocations, inflammatory disorders, chronic pain syndrome and nerve compressions. Many patients seeking the care of a hand therapist also suffer from such chronic problems as arthritis or neurological conditions. A hand therapist works closely with the physician to provide a continuum of care for our patients.

The Highest Standard of Care

A qualified hand therapist can evaluate and establish an appropriate treatment plan for any problem relative to the upper extremity. The hand therapist can effectively treat and rehabilitate the patient through such methods as:

Postoperative Recovery

- Management of open or sutured wounds, including debridement, to prevent infection and assist in healing
- Control of hypertrophic or hypersensitive scars
- Reduction of edema
- Control of scar tissue formation

Rehabilitation

- Management of acute or chronic pain
- Desensitization and/or sensory re-education following nerve injury or trauma
- Design and implementation of exercise programs to increase motion, dexterity and/or strength
- Splint fabrication for prevention or correction of injury
- Training in the performance of daily life skills through adaptive techniques and equipment
- Conditioning prior to returning to work
- Joint protection and energy conservation training
- Management of lymphedema
- Remodeling of scar/adhesions to facilitate tendon and nerve glide

Industry Consultation

Hand therapists may consult with various industries establishing preventative programs for workers with cumulative trauma disorders. Hand therapists recommend modifications of work stations and alternative work methods to help ensure healthy work styles of all employees.

Referring Patients: The Right Choice

- Accurate assessments, immediate care and effective treatment reduce overall treatment time
- The continuum of care eliminates the need for multiple medical providers
- Faster recovery results in decreased medical costs
- Resulting functional outcomes ensure a faster return to work and productive lifestyle
- Patient training and education reduce recurrence of repetitive injuries

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit ASHT's Web site at www.asht.org or call 312.321.6866.

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