

Occupational Therapy

## Arm and Hand Exercises

This booklet belongs to \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about arm and hand exercises, contact your occupational therapist.

\_\_\_\_\_ (OT) (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

After an injury, such as a stroke, you might have trouble using your hands. We call your weaker hand your 'affected hand' and your stronger hand your 'unaffected hand'. **The most important thing you can do is to continue to use your affected hand in all of your activities.**

This booklet describes exercises and activities to help strengthen and improve movement of your arms and hands.

### **About doing these exercises**

- It is normal for your muscles to get tired quickly after an injury. Do these exercises slowly and increase your strength over time.
- Stop the exercise if you experience pain. The next time you see your doctor or therapist, let them know which exercise gave you pain.
- Be gentle with your affected arm and hand. You may not have feeling in your arm or hand. If you are too rough, you could hurt yourself.
- Be careful doing activities that involve hot and cold items. You could burn or freeze your affected hand and arm without knowing it.
- Your hand has natural curves and does not lay completely flat. Do not try to push the affected hand into the table to completely flatten it.
- Make time each day to do your arm and hand exercises. When doing everyday activities, pay attention to how you are using your arms and hands. This will help you regain some use of your affected arm and hand.

Do only those exercises your occupational therapist has checked off (☑). Your doctor or therapist might add or change exercises just for you. If so, then always follow those instructions.

# Arm and Hand: Stretching Exercises

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- These exercises help:
- keep your hands and arms moving
  - prevent joint stiffness
  - help with blood flow

## Stretching exercises for the head and neck

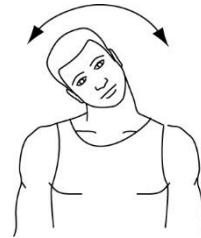
- Sit in a supportive chair with your feet on the floor.
- Sit up straight and try not to lean back into the chair.

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Slowly drop your right ear towards your right shoulder

Slowly drop your left ear towards your left shoulder.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times on both sides.**

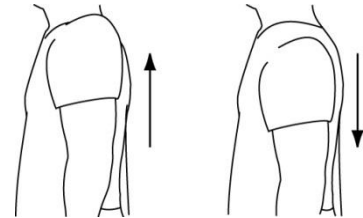


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Shrug your shoulders up.

Relax your shoulders

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



## Stretching exercises for the shoulder, elbow, and wrist

- Sit with a table in front of you
- Sit in a supportive chair with your feet on the floor.
- Sit up straight and try not to lean back into the chair.
- Clasp your hands together.

Keep hands clasped.

Bend your elbows.

Rest your elbows on the table.

Slowly bend your wrists from right to left.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



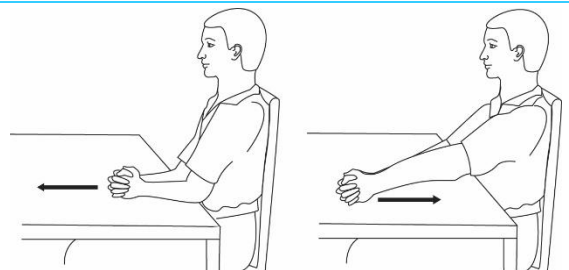
Keep hands clasped.

Straighten your elbows

Slide your arms forward on the table.

Try to reach as far as you can.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



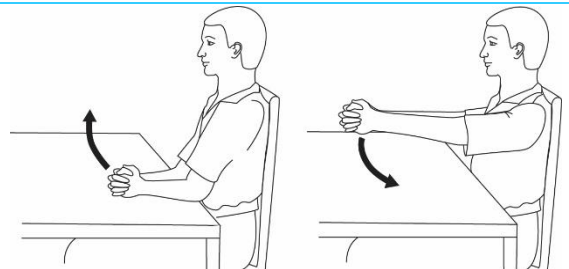
Keep your hands clasped.

Straighten your elbows.

Lift your arms up straight in front of you.

Lower your arms to the table.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



Place a washcloth on the table.

Put your affected hand on the washcloth, palm down.

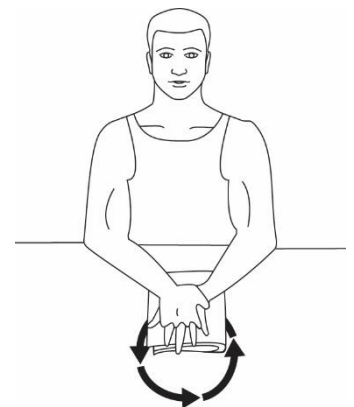
Put your unaffected hand on top of your affected hand.

'Polish the table' by moving your hands and arms around in small circles.

Gradually increase the size of the circles.

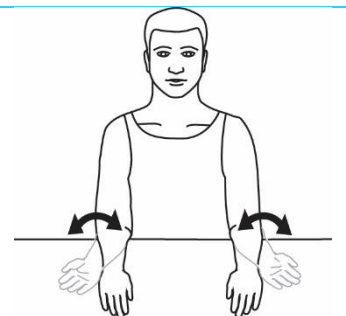
Change the direction of your circles and polish the other way.

**Repeat in each direction \_\_\_ times.**



With your elbows at your sides, alternate turning your hands palm-up and palm-down.

**Repeat in each direction \_\_\_ times.**



# Arm and Hand: Strengthening and Fine Motor Exercises

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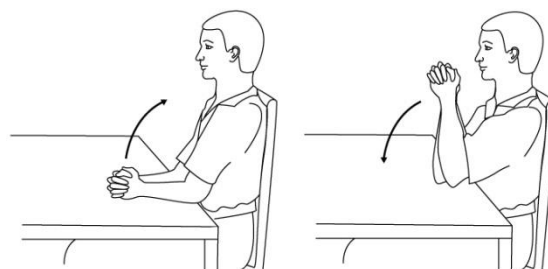
## Arm Strengthening Exercises

These exercises are to help you:

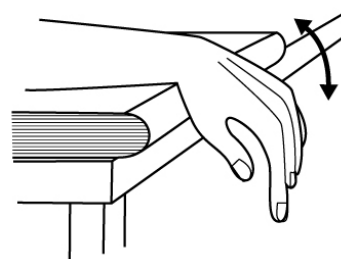
- increase your arm strength
- return to doing activities using your arms

- Sit in a supportive chair with your feet on the floor.
- Sit up straight and try not to lean back into the chair.

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- Clasp your hands together.  
Place arms on table.  
Keep your elbows on the table.  
Lift your hands up to your nose.  
Slowly lower hands onto the table.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



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- Place a book or stack of books on the table  
(about 1 ½" thick).  
Place your wrist over the edge of the book (s).  
Bend your wrist down.  
Lift your wrist up as far as you can.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



**Note** Occupational therapists often refer to hand exercises as 'Fine Motor Exercises'.  
When we use the word 'motor', we mean using muscles to move your body.  
'Fine motor' refers to using small muscles to do precise movements.

## Hand Strengthening Exercises

These exercises are to help you:

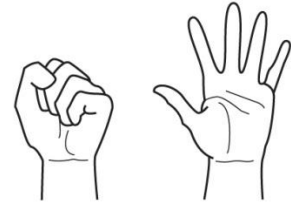
- increase your hand strength
- return to doing activities using your fingers and hands

Make a fist.

Hold your hand in a fist for 5 seconds.

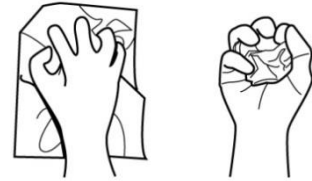
Straighten your fingers

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



Crumple a piece of paper into a ball using your affected hand

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



Roll therapeutic putty (such as 'Theraputty') into a ball using both hands.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



Squeeze water out of a wet sponge or wash cloth using both hands.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



Practice picking up items such as a plastic cup, can of soup, or water bottle.

Start with light items.

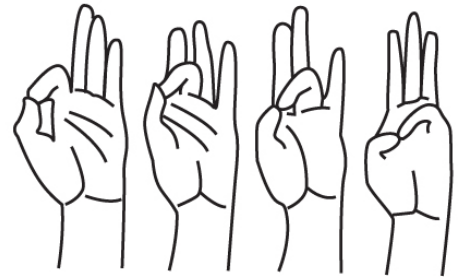
Slowly increase the weight of the item.

**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



## Finger Motor Exercises

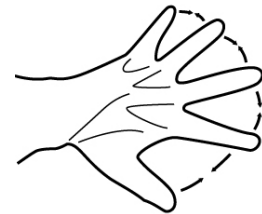
- Touch your thumb to each fingertip.  
If your thumb and fingers do not touch on their own gently help them to reach each other.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



- Place your affected hand with the palm facing down on a table.  
Tap your fingers on the table one at a time.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



- Place your affected hand with the palm facing down on a table.  
Stretch your fingers apart.  
Bring them back together.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



- Pinch therapeutic putty (such as 'Theraputty')  
between your thumb and fingers, one finger at a time.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**



- Take 10 to 15 clothes pins.  
Pinch a clothes pin open.  
Attach each clothes pin to the edge of a  
container or pot.  
Now remove all the clothes pins one at a time.  
**Repeat \_\_\_ times.**





# Arm and Hand: Sensation Exercises

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## Exercises to improve touch and feeling of your affected hand

After an injury your hand and arm may have numbness or a strong reaction to touching items. We refer to this as arm and hand sensations.

It is important to touch your affected hand and arm frequently to help you feel again.

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### Improving Touch

- Massage your arm and hand (with or without lotion).
- Gently touch your arm and hand with different textured items:
  - Cotton balls      Paint brushes
  - Light weight sandpaper
  - Fabrics such as satin, corduroy, cotton, Velcro
- Gently rub your arm and hand with a soft wash cloth.
- Roll a ball up and down your arm.
- Close your eyes and ask someone to touch your affect arm and hand in different places. Try to describe where you felt the touch.

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### Improving Feeling

- Rice Bowl
  - Place uncooked rice into a deep bowl (deep enough to fit your whole hand inside and have it covered by the rice.
  - Move hand around in the rice for 3 to 5 minutes.
  - Place 8 to 10 small objects into the rice bowl.
  - With your eyes closed, try to find the items with your hand.
  - When you feel an item open your eyes and check. Place the item on the table.

Objects to hide in rice:

Pen or pencil	Marbles
Eraser	Cotton balls
Clothes pins	Buttons of
Coins	different sizes
Paperclips	Other small items
Toothpicks	

# Arm and Hand: Everyday Activities

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## Activities in everyday life to increase arm and hand function

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### In the kitchen

- Wash and dry the dishes. (Be careful with knives.)
- Wipe the countertops and table.
- Load and unload the dishwasher.
- Turn on and off the kitchen water tap.
- Mix or beat food in a bowl with a large spoon.
- Open jars with screw lids.
- Open and close drawers and cupboards.

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### At meal time

- Drink from a cup or glass (use caution with hot liquids).
- Eat finger foods.
- Use a fork, knife and spoon.
- Spread butter with a knife.

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### Around the home

- Clean mirrors or windows.
- Water plants. Try using spray bottles filled with water.
- Place objects in a box or container and remove them one at a time.
- Iron clothes (Be careful).
- Dust items in your home.
- Put clothes in and out of washing machine and dryer.
- Fold clothes and towels.
- Put clean sheets on your bed.
- Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener.
- Cut a piece of paper using scissors.
- Staple papers and punch holes in paper.
- Plant flowers and pull weeds in the garden.
- Lock and unlock doors.
- Turn door handles.

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### Around the home - continued

- Pick up small items and place in a container. Such as coins, beans, marbles, seeds, buttons, toothpicks, cotton balls.
- Use tweezers to pick up small items.
- Open and close zip-lock bags
- Practice doing buttons and using zippers.
- Practice writing:
  - your name and signature
  - your address
  - the alphabet
- Practice drawing a line with a ruler.
- Practice typing on a computer.
- Practice threading beads.
- Screw nuts and bolts together. Start with a large size and switch to smaller sizes as you improve.
- Open and close safety pins. Practice pinning the safety pins to clothing.
- Tear sheets of paper or tissues into smaller pieces.
- Practice flipping coins. Place a row of coins on a table and flip them one at a time.
- Practice taking coins, bills, and cards in and out of your wallet.
- Roll a pencil between thumb and fingers.
- Place a rubber band around different sized containers.
- Put paper clips onto paper.
- Tie your shoe laces.
- Tie knots in rope.
- Peel vegetables.

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### Games

- Pass a large, soft ball back and forth with someone using both hands.
- Pass a smaller ball back and forth with someone using both hands.
- Pass a smaller ball back and forth with someone using just your affected hand.
- Throw a ball against a wall and catch it.
- Bounce a ball with one hand and then alternating hands.
- Copy or mirror another person's movements.
- Practice dealing a deck of cards, one card at a time.
- Practice shuffling a deck of cards.
- Play a game with playing pieces such as checkers, dominos, or mah-jong.
- If you have a piano,
  - Do simple five finger exercises by playing five notes, both up and down the keyboard.
  - Do simple hand stretching exercises by playing every other key, both up and down the keyboard.

**Remember to use your affected hand**

