

Desensitisation

Introduction

Following injury or surgery to the hand, the nerve endings may become oversensitive. This means that normal touch is more intense and uncomfortable. The following techniques are designed to reduce the sensitivity of your affected area. This programme can also be used in the early stages of nerve recovery when hypersensitivity may be a problem.

The aim is to bombard the nerve endings with 'normal' sensation to teach the receptors how to produce a normal response to touch, texture, temperature and impact. Only use the techniques that your therapist has indicated as some of the techniques may not be appropriate for you. It is important that the techniques are carried out on a regular daily basis to maintain progress

Immersion massage

This technique is a good starting point for treatment as it reduces the sensitivity before using the other methods described.

- Fill a container with a dry textured mixture for example lentils, rice and cereal.
- Place your hand in the container moving it around for approximately five minutes.

Change the texture regularly building up to a more uncomfortable one, for example rice and cereal.

Massage

Massage can be used to soften and reduce hardened scar tissue and minimise the sticking of scar tissue to the surrounding structures for example the tendons or skin. In this instance massage can also help make a scar less sensitive to touch. Start by applying some hand cream to the affected area.

- Starting at the edge of the affected area, begin massaging with the finger or thumb.
- Using light pressure, massage in a circular motion, concentrating on a less sensitive area first.
- Massage for a maximum of five to ten minutes until sensitivity has reduced, and then move to an adjacent area and repeat.
- Continue moving towards the most sensitive part until the whole area has been covered.

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Massage with textures

These can be used to help make an area less sensitive to uncomfortable materials that you come into contact with on a daily basis.

- Begin by lightly rubbing the sensitive area with a tolerable texture for example cotton wool. Continue until sensitivity reduces.
- Gradually increase to rougher materials or those that you find more uncomfortable.
- Gradually increase the amount of pressure that you can tolerate.

Vibration

Vibration not only assists with desensitisation but also relaxes the muscle that may have tightened due to pain or muscle tension.

- Use a mini-massager or the base of an electric razor or toothbrush.
- Use the massager in a circular motion over a less sensitive area moving towards a more sensitive area for approximately five minutes.

Please note: Only use this technique if advised by your therapist as in some circumstances it may worsen your symptoms.

Tapping

Tapping is particularly useful in desensitising the tips of the fingers. Begin by gently and slowly tapping the affected part on a soft surface. As this becomes more comfortable progress to a harder surface and with more speed.



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Further information

The day surgery unit can be contacted on 02476 966861 / 02476 966868 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross). For further information please contact Hand Therapy:

- at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 02476 966016
- at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663257
- our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 02476 965072

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 966861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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