

HAND PAIN GUIDE

Hand pain is extremely common. The sophisticated physiology of the hand gives it superior functionality and mobility, but it also makes it vulnerable to a wide range of injuries and degenerative conditions, especially as we age. These can be as sudden and dramatic as a broken bone, or as slow and stubborn as arthritis.

Common Causes

Arthritis is one of the most frequent causes of hand pain. According to the CDC, arthritis accounts for 18% or nearly 9 million reports of disability, making it the number one cause of adult disability. But not all arthritis cases are the same. Arthritis may be the primary cause of a person's symptoms or may appear secondary to another condition, such as gout, lupus, sarcoidosis, Lyme disease, or many others.

Although arthritis can affect any joint in the body, hands are one of the most commonly afflicted sites. Arthritis can take different forms, such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and even juvenile idiopathic arthritis. Each form has its own nuances and requires its own expert treatment.

Ulnar nerve injury, or Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, is another extremely common cause of hand pain. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) occurs when the carpal tunnel becomes compressed, causing irritation and impaired function in the median nerve. The result is numbness and weakness of the hands in mild cases; untreated, this may progress into general immobility, muscle atrophy, and even nerve death in the most severe of cases. Therefore it is imperative that CTS be rehabilitated under the guidance of a professional.

Overuse/repetitive motion hand injuries frequently occur in those who do a lot of detail



General Anatomy

In addition to a sophisticated network of muscles, ligaments, and nerves, the hand is composed of the phalanges (finger bones), metacarpal bones (hand bones), and carpal bones (wrist bones). The working combination of these systems allows for incredible agility and range of motion.

oriented work with their hands (such as painters, knitters, musicians, etc.) This occurs when the muscles and tendons become fatigued and inflamed and are not given proper time to rest and heal between bouts of activity. Overuse injuries are characterized by swelling, stiffness, aching, and pain that increases with activity.

Trauma is yet another hand pain culprit. Trauma injuries can occur from a fall, car accident, sports participation, or any activity where the hand may be suddenly injured. Broken bones, torn or strained tendons or muscles, sprained wrists, and dislocated fingers are all common trauma hand injuries.

Treatment

Most minor hand pain can be treated in a variety of ways.

Rest is an important part of hand pain recovery, but don't overdo it - a hand that remains inactive will quickly become stiff and have difficulty functioning. Instead, rest your hand from normal activities, but do slow, gentle finger and wrist circles to maintain your range of motion.

Ice/Heat therapy is wonderful for sore hands. Remember the following rule - use ice to reduce swelling and inflammation; use heat to loosen stiff joints.

The Next Step

Hand pain can be a debilitating injury for many people. Physical therapy can help put you on the path to freedom from hand pain by helping you increase strength, regain motion, and returning you to your pre-injury activity level.

You don't have to live with hand pain. At Idaho Physical Therapy, our caring, professional, experienced therapists can help you achieve the fastest, most complete recovery possible. Call us today to book your free assessment - **(208) 463-0022!**

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Gentle stretching and strengthening exercises can help to heal injured hands and reduce the likelihood of reinjury, but only if done correctly. See one of our experienced therapists for guidance on stretching and strengthening your hands.

Lifestyle adjustments are necessary for many cases of hand pain, especially overuse injuries. Adjusting or eliminating certain activities from your daily routine can make a big difference in how you feel. Take frequent breaks during activity, and use braces and other supports if possible. And always make sure you are using proper form during activities (such as knitting) to prevent further injuries. For some conditions (like arthritis), lifestyle adjustments are only secondary to professional treatment. Be sure to seek treatment for chronic and other long-term conditions.

Pain that is sudden, severe, is due to trauma or a more serious condition should be diagnosed and treated by a medical professional.

