

USING REFLEXOLOGY FOR HAND CONCERNS

Using reflexology to deal with specifically hand-related problems involves many of the same techniques and concepts as are applied to deal with problems in other parts of the body. In this section, we explain how to choose techniques that are best suited to dealing with your hand concerns, detailing how much, how long, and how often to apply them. We explain the use of pressure, stretch, movement, and other sensory experiences to help relieve hand problems. In addition, we'll consider your hand profile.

Many different types of job subject the hands to excessive demands, which can result in strain and injury. Manual workers, for example, may develop problems as a result of lifting heavy weights, from the constant vibration of power tools, or from the repetitive patterns of movement involved in using other tools and equipment. Office workers, on the other hand, may

suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome or repetitive stress injury (RSI) — both types of hand injury that may result from the repetitive movements of keyboard use.

WHY HANDS ARE IMPORTANT

Whatever the source of potential problems, maintenance of the hands' abilities is crucial for quality of life. The ability to use one's hands is of paramount importance in many jobs and lifestyles, with injury or strain potentially inhibiting not just work but also the things you enjoy doing in your spare time, such as sports or knitting or playing a musical instrument.

In addition to such obvious hand concerns, a hand problem may, according to reflexology theory, reflect or create a health concern. What started out as a hand stress can become a stress on the body (and vice versa). An injured finger, for example, may affect the neck, since the finger reflects the neck reflex area. Moreover, the neck is the source of muscles and nerves that create movement of the fingers, so any change in the finger's capabilities changes the actions of the arm and neck. All the more reason to keep your hands happy, since their health is so closely linked to your general well-being.

Overuse of the hands in sports, such as tennis, may give rise to strain or injury. Conversely, hand injuries may curtail participation in sports and other hobbies.





When working with a hand that is injured or aching, certain precautions must be observed:

Never work directly on an injury or an area that is sore to the touch. If you work on such a hand, set up clear boundaries to the work that can be done. If necessary, avoid working on the hand altogether.

Don't try to place too much stress on an already stressed hand. When overdone, the workout can be taxing instead of relaxing. Always be sure to work within the individual's comfort zone.

CAUTIONS

When working with older hands, be careful not to overwork, especially by applying too many hand desserts. Just as overworking muscles can have uncomfortable results, so overmoving a hand can also result in pain or discomfort.

Don't try to be too ambitious or expect instant results. If your hand problem has taken time to develop, it will take a while to bring about relief.

TIPS FOR ADDRESSING HAND CONCERNS

First, consider why your hands are tired or in pain. Aside from injury or arthritis, what is it that you do and possibly overdo with your hands? Think about your work, sports, hobbies, and volunteer activities. How often and for how long do you tax your hands?

Make it a rule to work and play only within the limits of your hands' comfort. Watch what you do with your hands: they are not hammers, wrenches, or pliers. Also, think before you act. For example, 60 percent of hand injuries at work would be avoided if workers wore gloves. When you put your hands to work, use them wisely.

Think about relaxation: how much, how long, and how often do you relax your hands?

Interrupt stress and do it frequently. Try this experiment: apply relaxation technique morning, noon, and night; or, pay attention to your hands each time they feel stressed. Figure out your pattern; discover which techniques can keep your hands happy. If your strategy is not working, try something else, a different technique, or maybe applying it at a different time of day.



KEYBOARDING

From computers to electronic gadgets and games, it seems that hands don't have a moment's rest in our technological world. Overuse of a computer keyboard can bring about carpal tunnel-like symptoms (*see pages 148–149*), while using the mini-keyboards on cellular phones and electronic games overtaxes the thumb. The relaxation exercises below can offer hands some relief.

Working the hands

The thumb plays a role in 50 percent of the hand's activities, and tension accumulated in the thumb can radiate outward to affect the whole hand. The following relaxation technique will help to reduce the strain. Once you've worked the hand in the four directions described, consider which movement showed the most stress.

1 Rest your hand in the palm of the hand to be worked. Press down gently with the heel of your hand. Hold for several seconds.



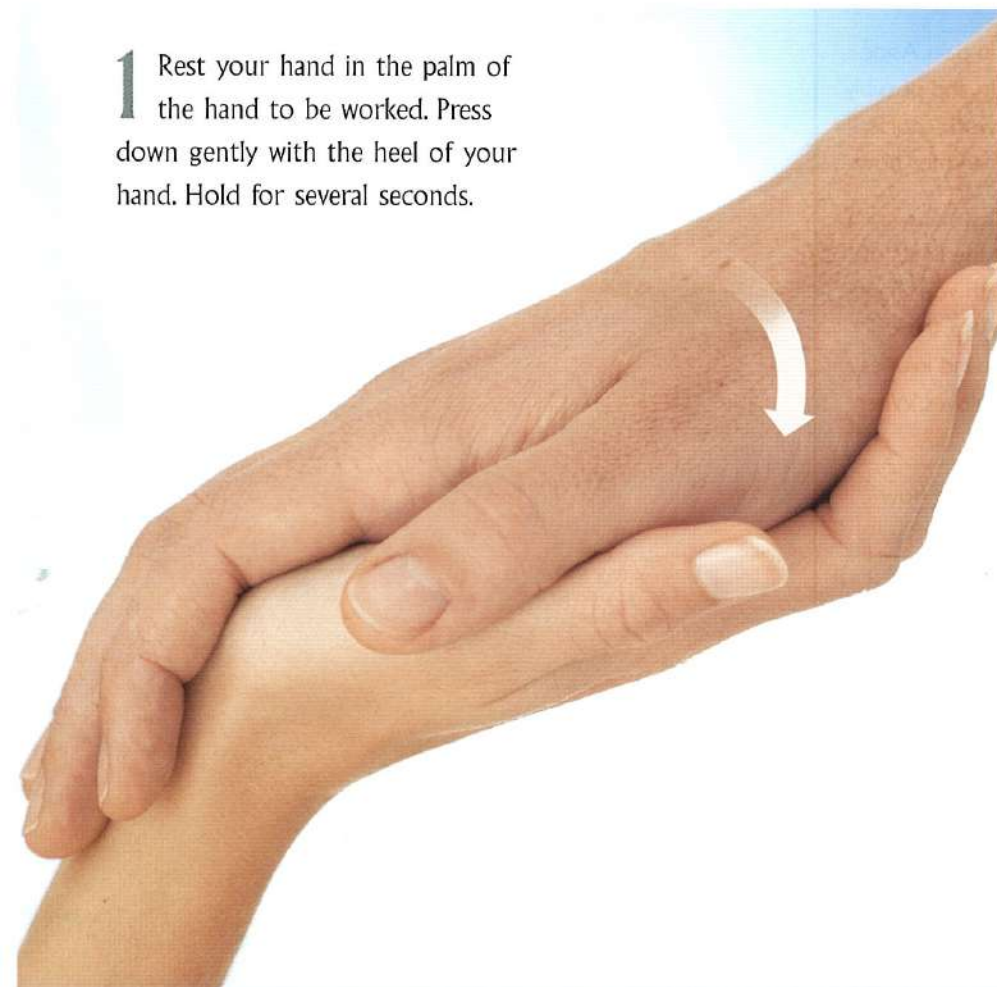
2 Press down gently on the top of the hand with the heel of your hand; hold for several seconds.



3 Rest your palm on top of the hand and curl your fingers around the edge of the hand. Gently pull up with your fingers.



4 Now curl your thumb around the other edge of the hand and pull upward, while pressing down with your fingers. Hold for several seconds.



Working a self-help strategy

A self-help strategy works well when you need a break for your tired hands. Rolling a golf ball around between the hands works several reflex areas, and is a useful self-help tool (see pages 102–109).



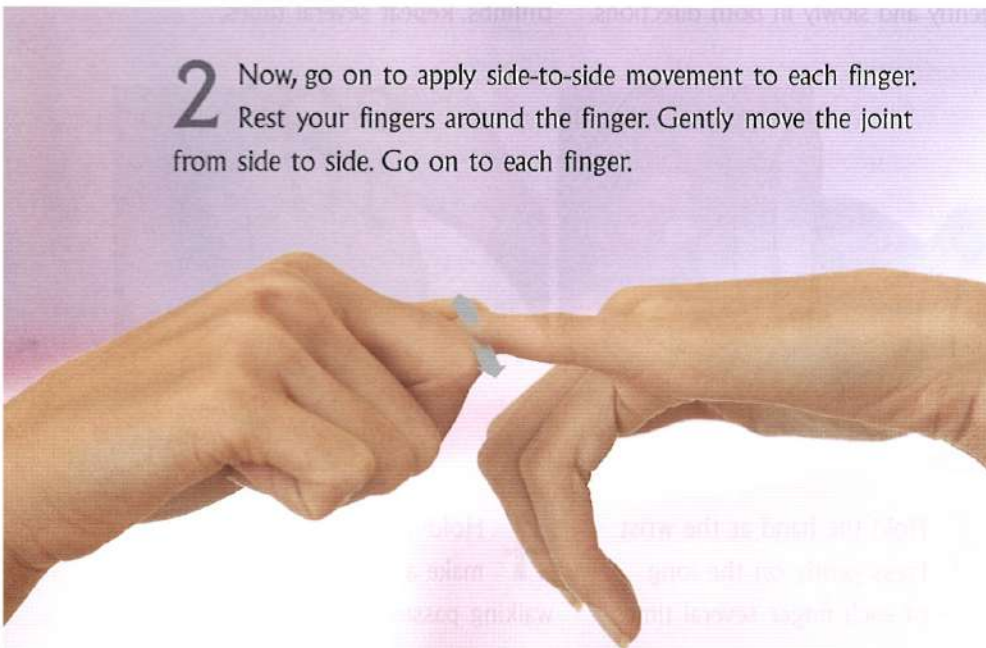
KEEPING THUMBS HAPPY

Text messaging and electronic games have introduced a new type of challenge for the thumb. Keep your thumbs happy by reducing the demands on them, resting them between bouts of use, and applying compensatory techniques. Pay attention to all the activities that place a strain on your thumb, considering the time you spent on different activities and their impact.



1 Gently pull your thumb. Turn it in first a clockwise and then a counter-clockwise direction. Repeat on each digit in turn.

2 Now, go on to apply side-to-side movement to each finger. Rest your fingers around the finger. Gently move the joint from side to side. Go on to each finger.



Relaxation techniques

The repetitive nature of typing at a keyboard can lead to tense, tired hands. One of the best ways to break up these habitual stress patterns is use the directional-movement stretches (see below and page 47). The complete range of movement this self-help exercise provides helps to relax the hands.



Press down with heel of top hand



Pull up with fingers of top hand



Press down with fingers of top hand



Press down with entire top hand

SPORTING HANDS

Participation in sports can place heavy demands on the hands — from the “handlebar palsy” suffered by cyclists who lean too heavily on their handlebars to the type of thumb injury that skiers commonly sustain. Whatever your sport, be aware of the strains being placed on your hands, adjusting your technique if necessary, and resting the hands when injury or strain occurs.

CAUTION

Always seek medical advice for any injury and follow the physician's recommendations. Rest is always best when it comes to strain-related injuries, so give your hand a chance to recover. Take care not to overstretch an injured hand, and never apply reflexology techniques directly to an injury.

Working the hands

As you apply these techniques, try to pinpoint areas of strain and overuse. For injured hands, however, seek a medical opinion before proceeding with your work.

CARE FOR SPORTY HANDS

When engaging in any sporting activity, always wear the appropriate protective gloves or mitts to protect your hands.

Know when enough is enough. If your hand is constantly aching following your nightly handball game, take some time off.

Consider adopting a warm-up or cool-down routine for your hands. Add some basic stretches, or try using health balls (see page 44) to strengthen your hands.

Between sessions, apply hand relaxation techniques, concentrating on overused parts of the hand.

When working with others, be sensitive to the individual. Be aware of his or her comfort zone.



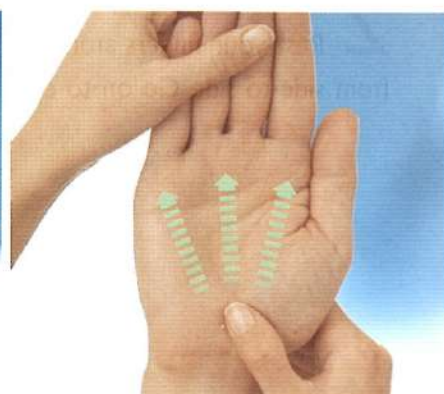
1 Hold the hand steady at the wrist and apply a finger-pull to each digit, simultaneously pulling gently and slowly in both directions.



2 Hold the hand as shown. Alternately and rhythmically pull and push with the flats of the thumbs. Repeat several times.



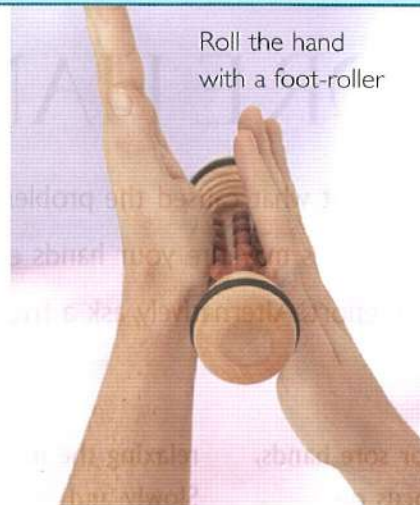
3 Hold the hand at the wrist. Press gently on the long bone of each finger several times.



4 Holding the hand upright, make a series of thumb-walking passes throughout the palm.

Self-help hand reflexology

As you apply these self-help reflexology techniques, think about what feels good and what doesn't, so that you become aware of your hands' tension levels. If you have suffered a hand injury, allow it time to recover before starting to apply technique.



2 Clasping the hand as shown, repeatedly push down on the knuckle above the middle finger.



3 Hold the finger as shown and apply the side-to-side technique. Repeat on each joint of each digit.

Relaxation techniques

For hands that have become over-stressed through sporting activities, the application of self-help techniques can help overall hand relaxation. In addition, these techniques can improve the hand's range of movement. This increased flexibility and relaxation, can not only help to speed recovery, but also to prevent future injury.



TIRED & SORE HANDS

If your hands are tired and sore, think about what caused the problem and seek ways of avoiding such stress in the future. Using self-help techniques may tire your hands even more, but a warm paraffin-wax bath is soothing and requires very little effort. Alternatively, ask a friend to apply the following desserts.

Working the hands

When working on someone with tired or sore hands, be aware of his or her comfort level. Focus on

relaxing the hands by applying lots of desserts. Slowly and gently apply the techniques listed below.



1 Repeatedly press down on the back of the hand as shown.



2 Grasp the recipient's hand as shown, and stretch the hand outward.

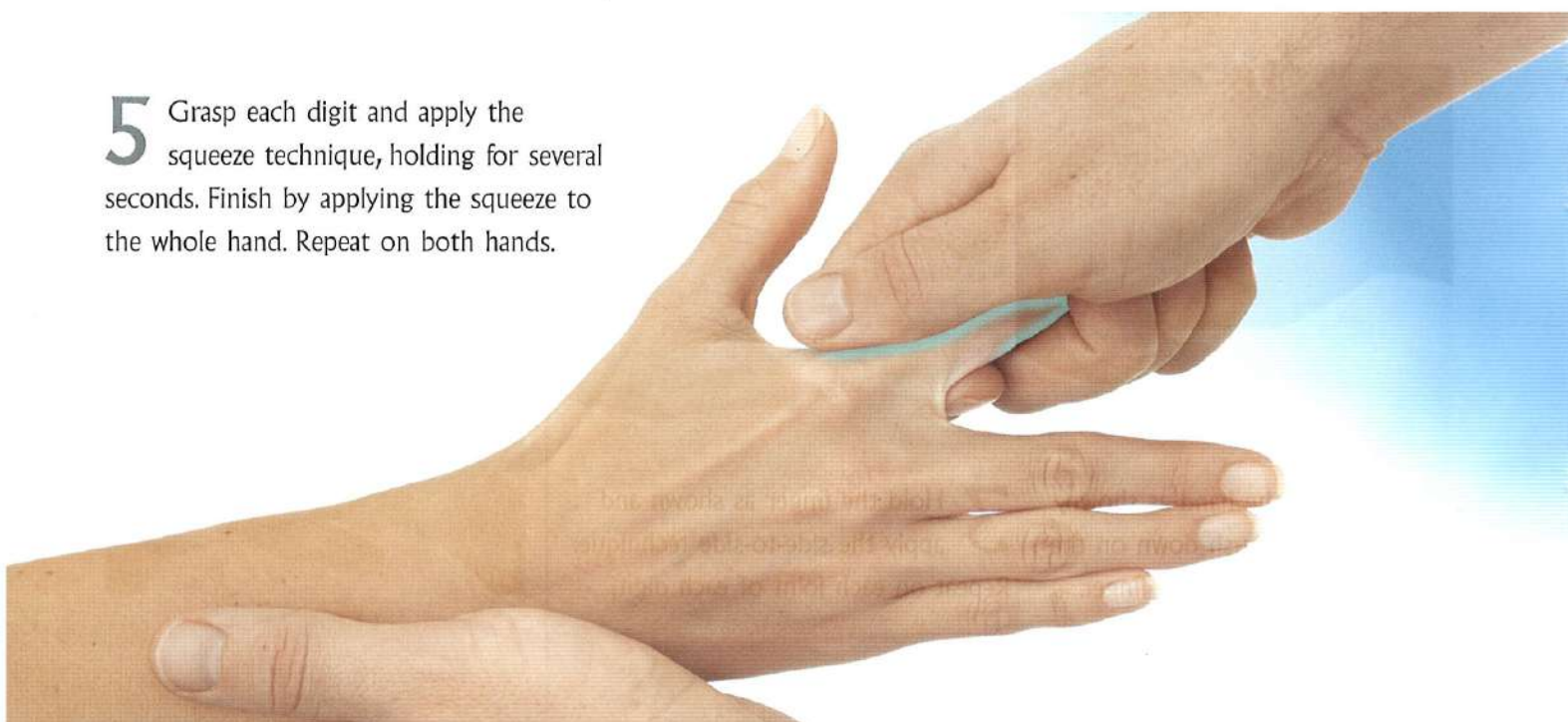


3 Apply the side-to-side technique to each joint of each digit in turn.



4 Move and counter-move the long bones as shown.

5 Grasp each digit and apply the squeeze technique, holding for several seconds. Finish by applying the squeeze to the whole hand. Repeat on both hands.



Working with a self-help strategy

While you are always the best judge of how and when to soothe your own tired or sore hands, the tips below can help.

- 1 If your hands are tired and aching, you'll want to begin your work with techniques that require minimal effort. Try a paraffin-wax bath or massaging the hand with a wand vibrator. Both offer soothing, general relaxation with very little effort.

HELPING TIRED HANDS

Consider what you overdo and either eliminate the activity or compensate with a counter-movement. For example, after curling your fingers around a tennis racket for lengthy periods, stretch them in the opposite direction to relax them.

Use TV-viewing time to relax your hands with a vibrating wand.

Think about your hands before launching into a project. If they are tired and sore, avoid activities that will cause further stress.

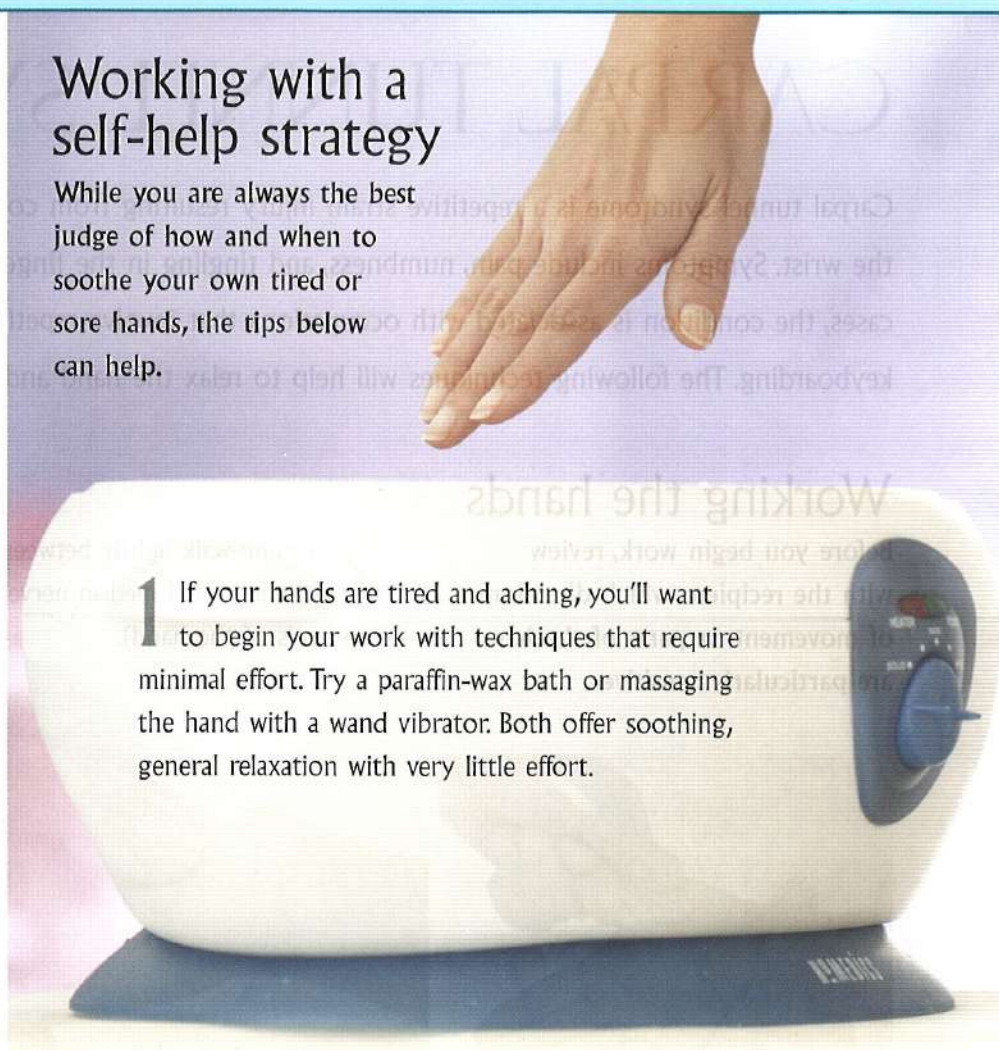
- 2 When your hands are tired or sore, think about which part is most stressed and focus your effort there. For example, if you have an overstressed thumb, hold it as you watch television, gently stretching and rubbing. The goal is maximum relaxation with minimal effort.

- 3 Focus on what you find most relaxing for your hands and your body. Once you've identified your favorites, stick with them.

- 6 Apply the walk-down/pull-against technique on each finger and both thumbs.



- 7 Gently apply the finger-pull technique to each finger and thumb in turn.



CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a repetitive strain injury resulting from compression of the median nerve at the wrist. Symptoms include pain, numbness, and tingling in the fingers, hands, and forearms. In some cases, the condition is associated with occupations that involve repetitive hand movements, such as keyboarding. The following techniques will help to relax the hand and may reduce the symptoms.

Working the hands

Before you begin work, review with the recipient which directions of movement or parts of the hand are particularly sensitive.



1 Pull gently on the thumb with one hand, while stretching the hand back with the other.

DOS AND DON'TS

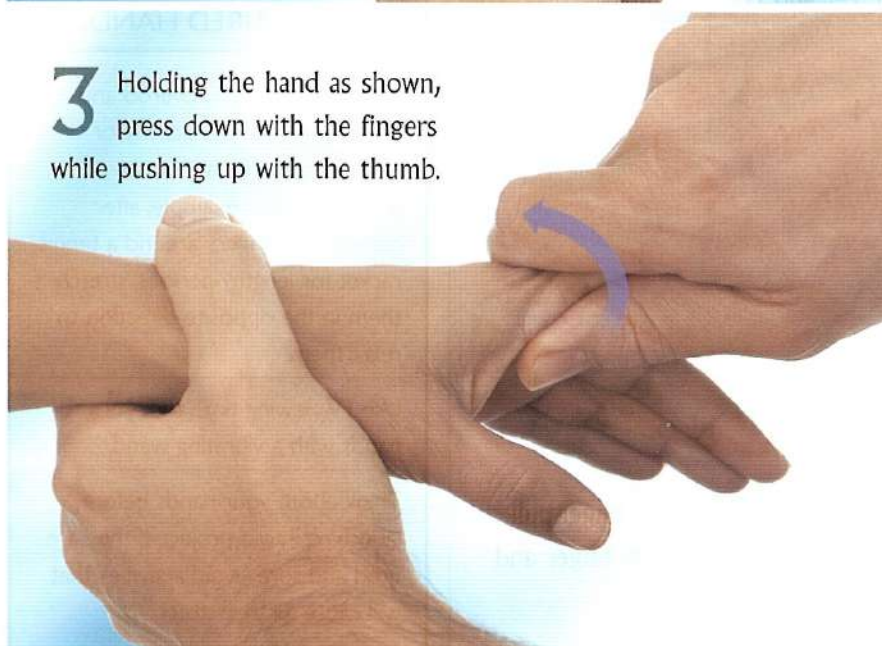
Start out gently, maintaining eye contact as you work to check that you are causing no pain. Be aware of how long you have worked.

Don't overwork the hand or work too long. Be careful not to pull too hard on the fingers, or to overly turn the hand.

2 Thumb-walk lightly between the heels of the hand [the impacted median nerve is in the area between the two heels of the hand].



3 Holding the hand as shown, press down with the fingers while pushing up with the thumb.



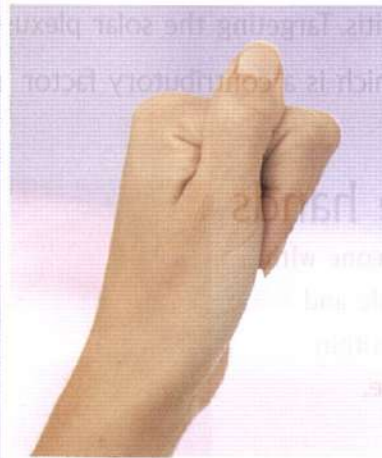
Working with self-help techniques

Tendon glides help to alleviate the symptoms associated with carpal tunnel syndrome by stretching and strengthening under-used muscles. Repeat the following sequence 3–5 times to begin with, gradually building up to 10 cycles.

Tendon glides

1 Hold your hand upright with your fingers and thumb outstretched.

2 Make a hook with your fingers by curling them inward. Keep the thumb straight.

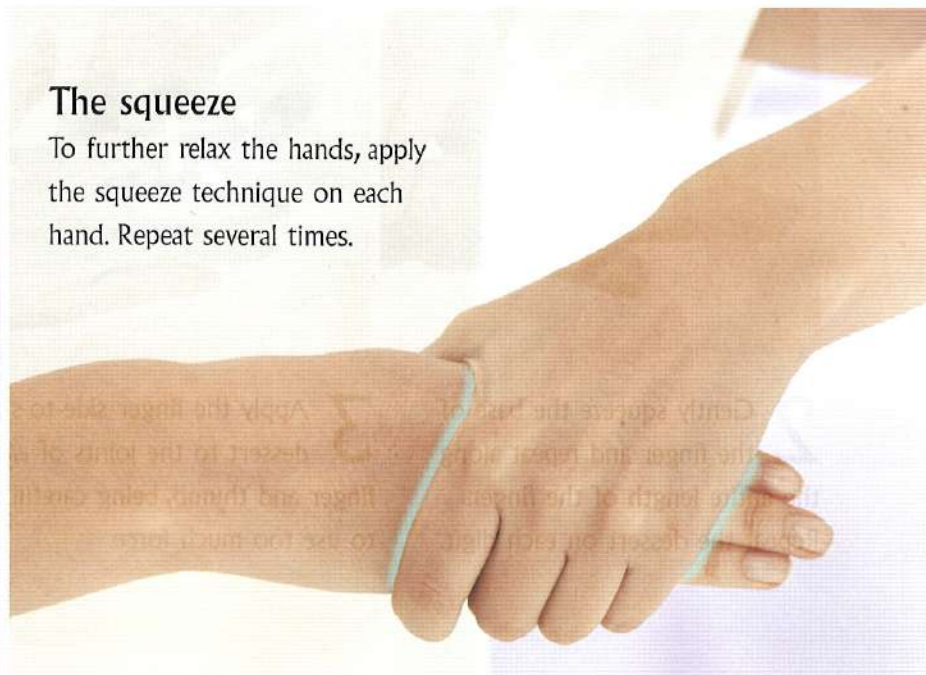


3 Curl your fingers over to touch your palm. Now curl your thumb over your fingers to make a fist and squeeze.

4 Wrap your other hand around your fist and squeeze. Repeat the entire sequence several times.

The squeeze

To further relax the hands, apply the squeeze technique on each hand. Repeat several times.



ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is a painful condition involving inflammation of the joints. Since arthritis affects the whole body, aim to work the whole hand, applying desserts to encourage a better range of motion. Work the kidney reflex areas to help eliminate waste products from the body, and the adrenal gland reflex areas to help fight inflammation, a characteristic of arthritis. Targeting the solar plexus reflex area can relieve tension, which is a contributory factor in arthritis.

RESEARCH

Researchers in China found that reflexology can ease the pain of arthritis. Results from the same study suggest that the application of self-help reflexology techniques can help to maintain these results. Other research has found that reflexology can help ease stiffness in the joints as well as the pain associated with it.

Working the hands

When working on someone with arthritic hands, be gentle and ensure that you work within his or her comfort zone.

1 To encourage better flexibility, apply some desserts. Grasp the index finger and pull gently. Repeat on each digit on both hands.



2 Gently squeeze the base of the finger and repeat along the entire length of the finger. Repeat the dessert on each digit.



3 Apply the finger side-to-side dessert to the joints of each finger and thumb, being careful not to use too much force.



4 For a calming effect, thumb-walk lightly throughout the SOLAR PLEXUS reflex area, making several successive passes.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Proceed slowly with hand desserts. Take note of the reaction, gauging how much, how long, and how often is best for future sessions.

A sudden release of toxins with flu-like symptoms is a common reaction to reflexology in people with arthritis. To avoid this, work lightly for short periods of time and focus on the organs of elimination such as the kidneys.

Maintain eye contact to gauge the individual's comfort zone by. Even a light touch can be painful.

If you have arthritis and are applying self-help techniques, consider using self-help tools for difficult-to-reach reflex areas.

Try soothing and relaxing arthritic hands by using a paraffin-wax bath or a wand vibrator.



5 With the thumb, press into the KIDNEY reflex area on the webbing and hold for several seconds. Reposition and press again.

Self-help hand reflexology

Applying reflexology to the hands for arthritis involves two strategies: one is to work the reflex areas associated with the overall condition and the other is to use desserts to encourage movement of stiff joints.



1 Begin by rolling a golf ball over the ADRENAL GLAND reflex area, the general area in the heel of the hand below the thumb.



2 Now, press gently into the KIDNEY reflex area located deep in the webbing of the thumb and index finger. Hold for a few seconds.



3 Mobilize stiff joints by applying the finger side-to-side dessert. Work the joints of each digit.



4 To maintain flexibility, apply the walk-down/pull-against dessert to each of the fingers and the thumb.

HAND INJURY

Accidents happen and, since hands are crucial to so many jobs, it's not surprising that hand injury is a common occurrence, making up one-third of all traumatic injuries. For serious injuries, especially those involving deep cuts, burns, or possible fractures, seek medical advice. But for minor injuries, the following exercises can help to relax the hand, easing the pain, and aiding your recovery.

Working the hands

Injured hands require a light touch. Ask the recipient which part of the hand is painful and then aim to work around it.

LEARNING TIP

Always move slowly and cautiously when working with a hand that has been injured: failure to do so may delay its recovery. Whatever you do, try not to be overly ambitious. This means you should avoid working the hand for too long, or moving it too rapidly.

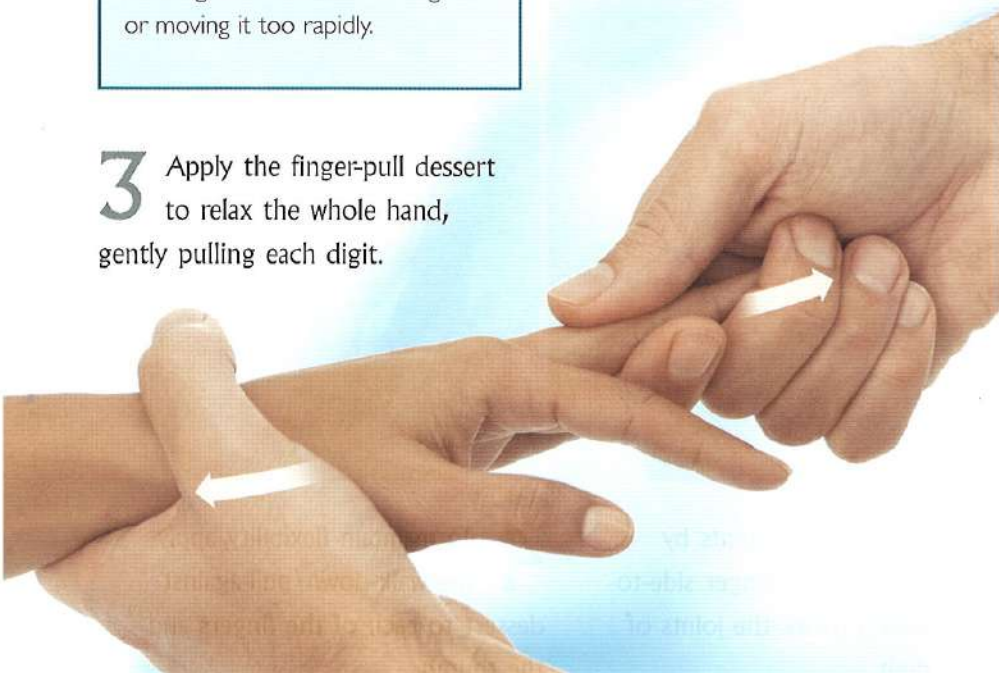


1 With the tip of the index finger, apply light pressure to the palm of the hand, avoiding direct contact with any injury.



2 Once the pain has subsided a little, thumb-walk lightly through the palm of the hand.

3 Apply the finger-pull dessert to relax the whole hand, gently pulling each digit.

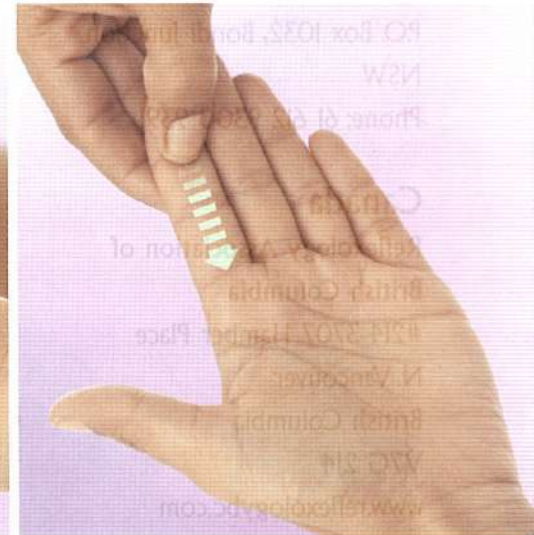
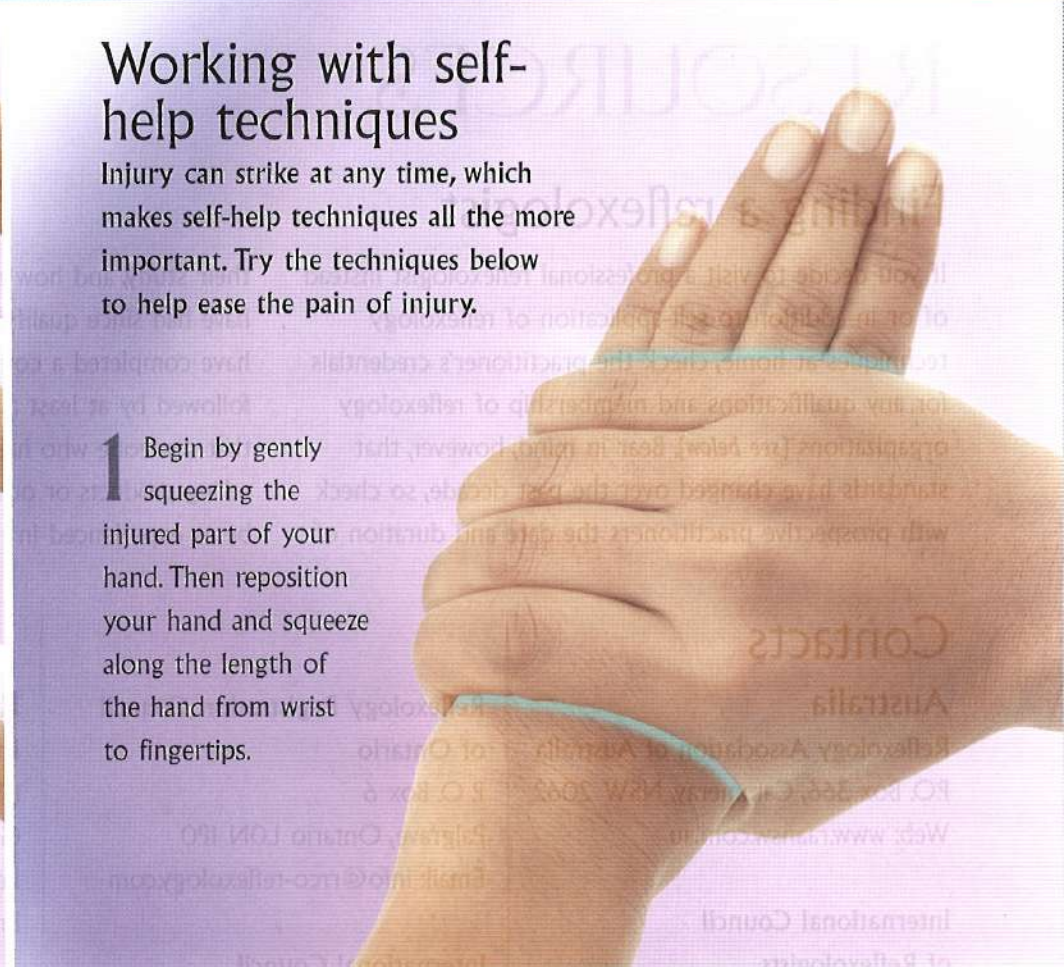


4 The finger side-to-side dessert relaxes the digits. Gently move the finger joint from side to side, as shown. Repeat on each finger and thumb in turn.

Working with self-help techniques

Injury can strike at any time, which makes self-help techniques all the more important. Try the techniques below to help ease the pain of injury.

1 Begin by gently squeezing the injured part of your hand. Then reposition your hand and squeeze along the length of the hand from wrist to fingertips.



2 Gently apply the finger-pull technique to each finger and thumb in turn, enclosing the digit within the right hand. Continue until the hand feels relaxed.

3 Rest the working fingers on the top of the hand, with the working thumb underneath, on the palm. Push upward with the thumb as you press down with the fingers.

4 Thumb-walk gently across the area that is recovering from injury. The picture above shows an injured index finger being worked on.