

PhysioBiz

Health newflashes

for bodies busy moving, working, playing, being.



In good hands

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Physiotherapy Society!

The human hand is a miraculous piece of engineering, with grasping fingers, opposable thumbs, highly sensitive fingertips, and the capacity for both strength and delicate work.

With 27 bones, many joints, a myriad muscles and a dense supply of nerves, there's a lot that can go wrong. Repetitive strain injuries (like overuse of keyboards), muscle sprains and strains, and even fractures can cause pain, as well as a range of conditions .

Just a few of the many conditions which can cause pain or dysfunction in the hands are:

- **Osteoarthritis**

As many as 55% of adults over 65 have arthritis in South Africa, a bit more than in the USA; the incidence in younger adults is surprisingly high in stats from the States: "...7.3% of people age 18-44 have doctor-diagnosed arthritis; 30.3% of people age 45-64".

- **Ulnar nerve entrapment**

Ulnar nerve entrapment actually occurs in the elbow, but it causes symptoms in the hands like tingling in fingers, weak grip strength, and pain.

- **Carpal tunnel syndrome**

The carpal tunnel is a passageway in the base of the hand which contains the median nerve. Jobs which demand repetitive activities, awkward hand movements, mechanical stress on the palm, vibration, pulling, pushing, twisting or tugging movements, may set off swelling in the carpal tunnel which squeezes the nerve and causes pain and other symptoms. Jobs like cashiers or hairdressers, activities like knitting, bread kneading, spray painting or milking, or excessive use of vibrating tools are often associated with carpal tunnel syndrome.

- **Traumatic injuries**

Hands are very often subject to injury, in sports, in jobs like construction work, and when people fall, because they use their hands to stop themselves. Because of the complexity of the hand, they may need extensive rehabilitation to return to comfortable and optimal function.

"While all physiotherapists learn about the hand in detail during their four-year university degree course, some physiotherapists develop a special interest in hands

because of their intricacy,” says Rogier van Bever Donker, President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. “These physiotherapists elect to do post-graduate courses on treating hands, and some will end up seeing mostly patients who need hand rehabilitation for more complex, difficult cases.”

See your physiotherapist if you are suffering from pain, weakness or grip problems in your hands. As a first-line practitioner, you can consult a physiotherapist directly, without a referral. She or he is able to assess and diagnose your problem. Most physiotherapists, in perhaps the majority of cases, will be able to give you all the treatment, exercises and advice necessary to alleviate symptoms; in those rare cases where it’s needed, they will know who to refer you to for further treatment.

Find a physiotherapist at www.saphysio.co.za.