



UPPER HAND

Giving you the upper hand on upper extremity care.

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I am frequently amazed at how far our patients travel to be treated by our physicians and therapists. It is often a challenge to make an appointment across town, but many of our patients come from across the state or neighboring states. At times, the therapy protocols require multiple visits every week for an extended period of time.

Ohio has 88 counties. There are ten counties in the state without a hospital. We receive patients from 53 of the remaining counties! We also have patients from Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky.

Many of our patients are transferred to us due to an injury or trauma that cannot be managed by a local hospital. Our Physician's reputations in hand and upper extremity trauma care, including replantation of amputations, were well known long before I came to Hand and Microsurgery Associates. Also, it is hard to match the professionalism and skill of our Hand Therapists.

The amazement comes from the remaining patients that seek us out for other conditions and chronic problems. It may be an assessment of a newborn with a congenital hand anomaly. It might be for evaluation of a carpal tunnel syndrome or progressive arthritis of the hands. At times it is to assess the outcome of a previous surgery and obtain a second opinion.

We appreciate all of you. Whether you are coming from near or far, we are grateful for the journey you make to see us. Be safe in your travels.

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If you are interested in sharing your story with others through our newsletter, feel free to contact me.

BlackBerry Thumb

Do your thumbs hurt? Did you receive a personal digital assistant (PDA) for the holidays? Have you been using your thumbs to compose e-mails and instant messages with this new gadget? You may be dealing with a repetitive stress injury coined the BlackBerry Thumb. This is often reported as chronic pain in the thumbs. The symptoms can develop with many of the new tools and toys available. It can also occur with a cell phone or hand controls for any of the popular video gaming devices.

The function of the thumb is for pinch gripping with a finger. The fingers have dexterity, not the thumb. A full-sized keyboard was designed with that in mind. The more dexterous fingers are used for striking the letter keys, while the thumbs are reserved for striking the spacebar. With the smaller design of a PDA, people tend to press harder compared to the larger keyboard. This results in the thumb doing more than your fingers would do on a traditional keyboard.

The American Society of Hand Therapists offers exercises and tips to minimize your injury risk. Of course, any continued pain should be evaluated by a physician. This allows you to obtain a correct diagnosis and begin early treatment.

Exercises:

Hold each movement for 10 seconds and do eight repetitions.

- Fold your hands together and turn your palms away from your body as you extend your arms forward. You should feel only a gentle stretch.
- Fold your hands together and turn your palms away from your body but this time extend your arms overhead.
- Open your hands and spread your fingers as far apart as possible.
- Place your hand just above the back of the elbow and gently push your elbow across your chest toward the opposite shoulder.
- Raise one arm overhead. Bend the elbow. Place the opposite hand on the bent elbow and gently push the elbow back to stretch the muscle on the back of the upper arm. Don't forget to do both sides on these last two exercises.

Tips:

- Use a neutral grip when holding the device-meaning the wrist is straight, not bent.
- Take frequent breaks, at least every hour.
- Write fewer and shorter messages-and use abbreviations.
- Try to avoid only typing with your thumb, use your other fingers as well.

Patient Story: Alexandria and Sydney Eckert

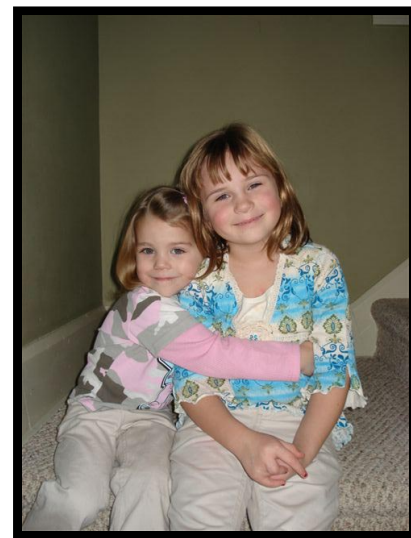
In this issue, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to speak with two sisters, Alex and Sydney, who were born with syndactyly, or “webbed fingers”. Both of the children had both hands involved. They are two active, happy children and it seems nothing is able to slow them down!

In syndactyly, if the webbing involves only the skin and flesh, it is described as “simple”. If the bones are joined together, it is called “complex” syndactyly. Both of the girls were diagnosed with complex syndactyly. The goals of surgery are to improve the appearance of the hand and to prevent progressive deformity from developing as the child grows.

Alex first met Dr. Nappi prior to her second birthday. She had initially been evaluated by a physician at a children's facility. Her father had been given Dr. Nappi's name by an acquaintance near their home in Galion, Ohio. Mom, Christi, reported that Alex instantly took to Dr. Nappi. She also stated that she immediately felt comfortable with him and confident in her decision to have him involved in her daughter's care.

For Alex, the first of three surgeries occurred when she was two. Alex tells me that she may not need the subsequent surgery for 2-3 years. She has had her fingers separated and uses her hands as any six year old would. She said that Dr. Nappi was always fun and helped her to relax when she was getting ready to go into surgery. She had even named a stuffed dog after him.

Sydney is now three and it has been a year and a half since her first surgery. It will be several years before another surgery will be needed. Although it has been a year since Sydney has seen Dr. Nappi, she still giggles when she talks about him. Neither of the girls required any hand therapy following their surgeries. Christi said that Dr. Nappi told her that their play and coloring would be the best therapy for them...“just let them be kids.”



With a congenital hand anomaly such as syndactyly, early evaluation by a Hand Surgeon is beneficial. Although surgery is done when the child is a bit older, growth and development of the hands can be monitored. Christi reported that Dr. Nappi had suggested the initial surgery be done prior to a child beginning daycare because “children like to be able to count on their fingers”.

DID YOU KNOW...?

How to live “one handed in a two handed world?” For most of our patients, this is only a temporary situation and there is usually someone around to help. I want to share some techniques or “secrets” that may help you when you are by yourself. Even though you have injured your hand, you still have the rest of your body to help you. Keeping things closer to you will allow you to take advantage of that. Holding a jar between your knees to stabilize it while you open it with your uninjured hand is a simple example. How about putting that same jar in the top drawer in the kitchen and using your hip to keep the drawer closed and the jar wedged in place while you open it?

Your jacket or shirt is easier to put on when you start with your injured hand/arm first and pull it up past your hand and wrist. Next, reach around from behind with your uninjured arm, find that other sleeve, pull the jacket on and straighten it up. You need to remember that your uninjured hand is actually four fingers and a thumb. You should use all combinations of that to accomplish your goal. To zip up that jacket, pinch the tab side of the zipper and jacket with your index and middle fingers while you grab the other end with your thumb and remaining fingers close to the edge. Slide the end into the base, press close into your body, holding the zipper tab with your thumb and index fingers and pushing with the remaining fingers, inch the zipper up. Yes, it does take some practice, but it can be done.

Another challenge is buttoning a shirt. Begin by lining up the shirttails and starting from the bottom. First, line the buttonholes over the buttons and poke your index finger through the hole while pinching the button into the hole. When the button is half through the hole, finish pushing the button with your thumb. If that doesn't work, use your thumb to find the hole and push the button through from behind with the other fingers. Depending on your situation, snaps, Velcro® closures, and pullover shirts or tops might be easier.

Also, there are “gadgets” or adaptive equipment, as we like to call them. These days, they can be found at most drug stores, kitchen stores or online. Grab-bars in the shower or bath area are especially helpful. There are some that can be temporarily installed, but a permanent installation would provide a long term benefit. Losing the use of your hand or arm may affect your balance. As you age, balance problems can develop. (Many people injure their arms or other body parts with a fall.)

Shampoo and toothpaste with flip top lids, long handled sponges, terry cloth bathrobes, back scratchers and disposable flossers are just a few items that might make your life easier while you are recovering from your hand injury. Once you start looking, many pieces of adaptive equipment are easily found on store shelves for the general two-handed public.

It may seem impossible to accomplish most everyday tasks with just one hand, but keeping in mind a few principles, you

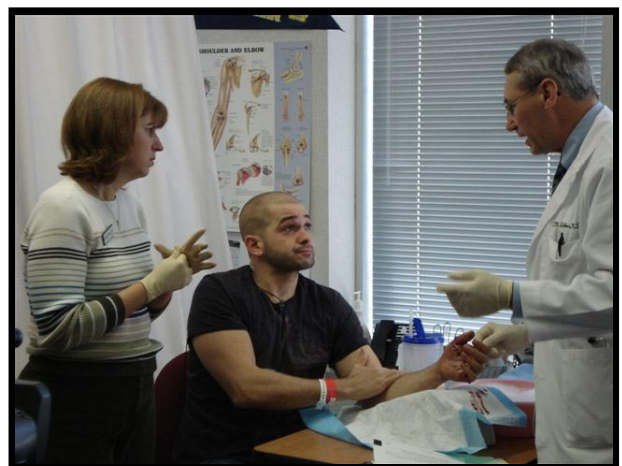
should be able to adapt to the world around you. Think about what you need to do and give yourself enough time to do it. Can you use your body to help you? Is there some gadget or piece of adaptive equipment that might help? As with anything, practice makes perfect. Your therapist can help you identify ways to do the tasks you need to do and to find the appropriate adaptive equipment to assist you. We have a wonderful book, “One-Handed in a Two-Handed World,” by Tommye-Karen Mayer that was given to us by one of our former patients. This is an excellent resource.

Janet Bailey, OTR/L, CHT
Columbus Hand Therapy

Ed Sanders and his Extreme visit to Columbus

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition carpenter, Ed Sanders was involved in a potentially devastating hand injury while the show was in the Columbus area in November. While finishing a project, he accidentally sliced the width of his left palm with the blade of an electric saw.

Medics from the Whitehall Fire Department were on the scene and rushed him to the Hand Surgeon on call, Dr. Lawrence Lubbers. Following four hours of surgery, all of the injured structures were repaired and the large open wound was closed. Less than 48 hours following the accident, Ed reported to Columbus Hand Therapy to begin the rehabilitation process with Kathy Villacres, OTR/L, Certified Hand Therapist (CHT).



Ed has returned to Columbus several times for additional sessions in Hand Therapy. Dr. Lubbers has stated that Ed should expect “near normal function” of his hand with continued rehabilitation.

His accident is to be a part of the show, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. It is scheduled to air Sunday, February 11th. Please check your local listing for the time.



We caught Rehabilitation Tech, Tami Turner playing Rudolph just before the holidays. She was well received by the patients and staff alike. We hope you were able to relax, have some fun, and enjoy the holidays.

We all wish you much happiness in the New Year!



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