

Treating sensitivity in hand scars (desensitisation)

Hands Burns and Plastics Therapy

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: April 2025

Next review: April 2028

Leaflet number: 1165 Version: 2

Introduction

Our hands are very important as they let us touch and feel things. They are naturally more sensitive than other parts of the body. After an injury or operation to your hand it can be very tender. The nerves within the scar on the skin can sometimes become very sensitive. Touch or pressure to that area can feel unpleasant and even painful. This should improve over time. For some people this sensitivity can worsen if left untreated. This reaction is known as 'hypersensitivity'.

This leaflet will tell you about different treatment exercises and techniques. You can use this to reduce hypersensitivity in a scar on your hand. This process is called desensitisation.

How will the treatment exercises help?

The exercise makes the scar on your hand less sensitive. They will help you to teach your hand to respond normally to touch. After any injury the skin of the hand must get used to being touched again. This will make the tenderness go away. If you do not touch the sore areas of your hand it can stay very sensitive and tender.

You should do the exercise 4 to 6 times a day. The more you do the quicker you recovery.

The treatment exercises can be uncomfortable, even painful at first. It is important to stick with it. Over time you will become more tolerant to things that caused you discomfort or pain before.

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Desensitisation exercises

You should do these exercises when **your wound is closed and dry**.

Do the exercise 4 to 6 times a day.

Massage:

Use a perfume free moisturizer (like E45 cream). Massage over and around the sensitive area in circular movements. Continue for 5 minutes.

You may want to start massaging away from the sensitive area. Then slowly move towards the sensitive area. When the area becomes less sensitive slowly add pressure to your massage.

Material and texture massage:

Use different materials and textures to work out which causes you the least and the most discomfort on your scar. We may give you some of these materials and textures. But you can use items from your home (like a towel, a child's toothbrush, the seams on your clothes).

1. Start with the material that causes the least discomfort.
2. Gently rub the material over a non sensitive area. This is so the hand can feel what a 'normal response' to the material is.
3. Then slowly and gently rub the material working towards and over the area. Make sure the material is touching your skin with the pressure.
4. Continue to rub the area in different directions for about 5 minutes until the area feels numb or no longer sensitive to that material.
5. After 1 hour return to the same material and repeat.
6. When this material is no longer uncomfortable you can then move to the next material or texture.

If you are using rough materials (like hook velcro), rub gently to avoid causing any skin damage.



Hand dipping (immersion massage):

Use different small objects with different textures (like uncooked rice grains, lentils, beads). Work out the order which causes you the least and the most discomfort on your scar.

1. Fill a bowl with the object that is most easiest to touch.
2. Place your uninjured hand or area in the bowl so your brain feels what a 'normal response' to the object is.
3. Then place your injured area in the bowl with the object.
4. Move it around in circles for 2 minutes. Change the direction and speed.
5. As your discomfort improves, slowly move onto the more uncomfortable objects.
6. You can also put a mixture of small objects into the bowl. You can put buttons or keys and pick them out with your injured hand.



Tapping (percussion):

1. Gently tap the affected area or scar.
2. Slowly add pressure when you tap.



Everyday activity:

Use your hand for your usual everyday activities. Do this when you can in as much of a normal way as possible.

It is easy to not use your injured area without noticing. Think of how you would normally use it in the everyday activity, and try to copy that.

Start off with light activities like washing dishes or playing cards. Then move onto heavier activities as you improve.



How long will it take to see improvements?

It may take many sessions before you see some improvement. Your therapist will tell you on how long to continue doing the treatment exercises for.

These techniques can be uncomfortable at first. This will improve if you do them regularly.

What if I do not feel any improvements?

If you:

- are finding the desensitisation programme difficult
- feel your symptoms are not getting better
- feel your symptoms are getting worse

Please contact your therapist.

Contact details

Name of therapist: _____

Phone number: _____

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