

Looking after your hand and arm in the early stages after a stroke

Stroke Services

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Over 75% of people have changes in their arm after a stroke¹. These could be

- weakness,
- pain
- and change in touch.

This leaflet has advice to help with early recovery and looking after your hand after a stroke.

Guidance advises regular and repetitive practice to help with recovering arm movement after a stroke².

Do not do exercises in this leaflet unless your physiotherapist or occupational therapist tells you to. If you get any pain or discomfort then stop and get advice.

¹stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke/physical-effects-of-stroke

²www.rcplondon.ac.uk/guidelines-policy/stroke-guidelines

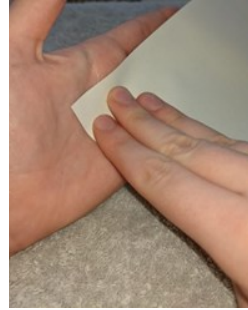
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Sensation

This aims to improve the ability to feel in your hand.

- Rub your affected hand with different materials such as tissue paper, cloth, tip of a pen lid. Focus on your finger tips and the palm of your hand.
- Think about how each of these feel in your unaffected hand whilst doing it.
- You can also get a friend or relative / family member to help with these exercises.



Self-massage

This aims to improve the ability to feel in your hand. It also helps to reduce any stiffness.

- Use your thumb to massage your affected hand.
- Focus on the soft areas at the bottom of your thumb, little finger and then between each finger.



Hold your affected hand with your unaffected hand.

Using your affected hand, gently bend and straighten the fingers of your unaffected hand.



Mental imagery

This aims to help the areas of the brain involved in movement.

Try and practice this in a quiet place. Sit upright and comfortably before beginning.

An example is below, this can be changed for different tasks.

Reaching for a cup.

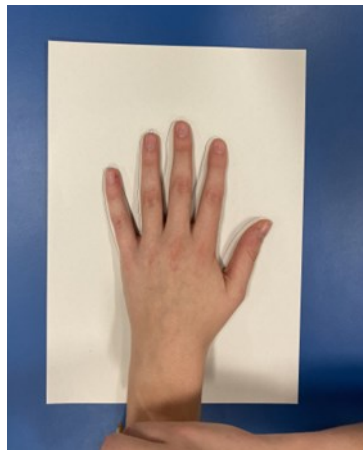
Use the directions below to imagine reaching for a cup:

- Today we are going to imagine reaching for a cup on the table that is in front of you. The cup is half full of water.
- Bring your arm forward slowly toward the table in front of you.
- Begin to open your fingers and thumb as you move your arm towards the cup.
- Straighten your elbow as you reach for the cup.
- Think about opening your thumb and fingers just wide enough to go around the cup.
- Grasp the cup gently between your fingers and thumb.
- Squeeze your fingers and thumb hard enough to lift the cup off the table.

Stable hand

This aims to improve the strength in your hand. Stick a sheet of paper onto the table.

- Place your affected hand onto the piece of paper.
- Hold a pen in your unaffected hand.
- Draw around your affected hand, trying to keep it still whilst you do this.



Stable wrist

This aims to improve strength in your wrist

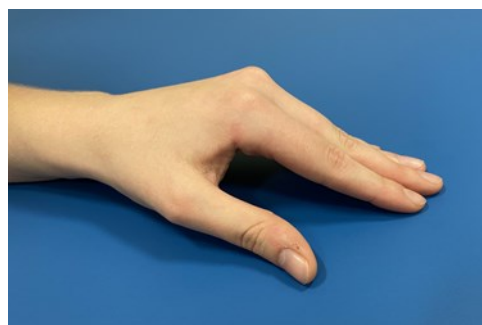
- Place your affected arm on a table with your thumb on top.
- You can use your unaffected hand to help move your arm into position.
- Try and keep your affected arm still.
- Then try and tilt your forearm slightly to the left and right.



Shaping your hand

This aims to improve the strength of the muscles in your hand.

- Place your affected hand and wrist flat on a table.
- To make this exercise easier you can place a paper towel under your finger tips.
- Bend at your first knuckles, keeping the rest of your fingers straight to make a small bridge shape with your hand.
- Relax your hand then repeat the movement.



Exercises with friends / family

Pulling paper

This aims to improve the strength in your fingers.

- Put a piece of paper or cloth on a table.
- Place your affected hand on the table so your finger tips are resting on the paper or cloth.
- Ask a friend or family member to gently pull the paper or cloth in different directions.
- Try to stop it moving.



Shaking hands

This aims to improve the strength in your hand and arm

- Have a friend or relative hold your affected hand in a 'handshake' position. You may need to rest your elbow or forearm on something when doing this.
- Try to squeeze and then release your friend / relatives hand.
- Have your friend / relative gently shake your hand, try to join in if you can.

How to sit to support your arm

- Keeping your affected arm in a supported position may help to reduce pain and limit muscle tightness.
- Make sure that your affected arm is supported when sitting.
- Try and sit up tall and well back in the centre of your chair or wheelchair.
- Rest your feet on the floor or wheelchair footplates.
- Try to have your knees directly above your feet.

Using a pillow as support

Use 1 or 2 pillows to support your arm (see below).

Try to keep your fingers and thumb relaxed. Make sure they are not curled.



Using a table as support

Use a side table or table attachment for a wheelchair to support your arm (see below)

Try to keep your fingers and thumb relaxed. Make sure they are not curled.



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