

**Your Occupational Therapist is:**

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**Tel no: 01926 600818 option 5**

**Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm**

**Author:** Advanced Occupational Therapist.

As a key provider of healthcare and as an employer, the Trust has a statutory obligation to promote and respect equality and human rights. This is set out in various pieces of legislation including: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act (2005), Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Age Discrimination Act (2006)

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for patients and their families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600054 or using the phone links which are available in both hospitals or calling in at the office located in the main entrance at Warwick hospital.

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# South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

## **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

Hand and Upper Limb Service

### ***De-sensitisation***

*Patient Information*

SWH-00336

## Sensitivity

Increased or reduced sensitivity is a common problem, which can affect specific areas following surgery or trauma.

The techniques in this leaflet are designed to help reduce the sensitivity of an over-sensitive area, and can also be used to stimulate nerve recovery if you have reduced sensation or numbness.

The aim of these techniques is to flood the nerve endings with “normal” sensation to teach the nerve receptors how to produce a normal response to touch, texture, temperature and impact.

At first these exercises may be uncomfortable, even painful but it is important that you persevere with them. In time the discomfort will become less as you become more tolerant to the things that are causing you discomfort.

**Only use the techniques that your therapist indicates on this leaflet as some of the techniques may not be appropriate for your particular condition.**

### Massage

Massage can help make a scar less sensitive and minimise the risk of skin sticking to surrounding structures as it heals. You can massage with your unaffected hand, or you may have to ask some-one to do it for you.

- Using an un-perfumed moisturising cream e.g. aqueous cream or E45. Begin massaging the area in circular motions keeping constant contact and pressure to the skin.
- Gradually increase the pressure as your tolerance increases.
- Massage for 5-10 minutes or until the area feels numb.
- You may also roll your thumb or tap gently over the area.
- Vibration massage can be helpful with treating areas of over-sensitivity, you can use either a mini-massager (as used by your therapist), the smooth side of an electric toothbrush or the base of an electric shaver. Use these in circular movements over the affected area for about 5 minutes.

### Texture massage

- Using a variety of textures, from light/soft to firmer/rougher, identify the softest texture you can tolerate in the affected area.
- Gently rub the texture around the affected area moving towards the sensitive part. Keep the texture in constant contact with the skin and maintain an even pressure.
- Continue with this texture for about 10 minutes or until the area feels numb.
- Gradually increase to the rougher textures or those that you find more comfortable.
- Repeat this massage 4 – 5 times a day if possible.

### Immersion massage

- Fill a container with a textured, dry material e.g. rice, lentils, cereal.
- Place your affected hand into the container and move your hand around in small stirring movements, varying the speed and direction.
- You can also bounce your hand up and down within the container.
- Continue with this for 3 - 4 minutes.
- Try and complete this massage 3 - 4 times a day.
- Once these materials become tolerable, then change the contents of the container to harder, larger dry materials e.g. dried pasta or beads.
- You can also put small objects into the dry materials e.g. buttons, keys, coins and pick them out when able.

### **When will my symptoms get better?**

Sensitivity problems can take some time to improve; it is very difficult to tell you exactly how long your recovery will take as this depends on the cause of your problems.

It is very important that you persevere with treatment and are consistent with your approach.

The more consistent you are with your treatment programme the faster your symptoms will be relieved.

If you have any concerns regarding your programme or progress then please discuss your concerns with your therapist.