Merivale Hand Clinic

Desensitisation

WHAT IS SENSITISATION AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Hand injuries are often very tender during the early stage of healing. Unfortunately, this tenderness does not always go away by itself. This can be called sensitisation or sensitivity. The nerves in the hand are special and are more sensitive than other parts of the body. When a part of your hand or arm is sensitive, normal touch feels extremely uncomfortable or irritable.

HOW IS SENSITISATION TREATED?

After any injury, the skin of the hand or arm must get used to being touched again for the tenderness to go away. If you do not touch the sore areas of your hand or arm, they may stay very sensitive and tender. The goal of desensitisation is to lessen the sensitivity to your hand or arm after injury by bombarding the nerve endings with sensory (feeling) feedback. You can lessen the feeling of tenderness by deliberately bombarding the sensitive nerve endings with different types of feedback.

Desensitisation should be started at a level that is irritating but not painful. It is normal to be a little uncomfortable while doing this or shortly afterwards. If the feedback is too painful, try using less pressure. If that does not work, then give yourself a several hour break and try again.

Massage

Using the uninjured thumb or fingers, massage in circular movements, starting in the area most comfortable around the scar or sensitive area and progress to massage directly over the scar or sensitive area. Begin with light pressure and gradually increase this as you can.



Tapping

Tap lightly on the tender area of your hand. This can be done with your other hand or a light object such as a pen. Gradually increase the pressure.

Pressure

Using a finger, apply pressure to the tender area of your hand. Keep the pressure there for about 15 seconds.

Textures

Rub the area with a variety of textures, such as cotton wool, polar fleece, a towel or velcro. Begin with the least irritating texture and gradually increase the texture as your tolerance to the touch improves.

Immersion

Fill a container with lentils, rice, macaroni, dried beans, or something similar that is only just bearable for you to touch. Immerse your finger or hand into the material and work the hand, making small stirring movements. Once this becomes more bearable, change the texture



WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY REHABILITATION?

You should expect that your hand or arm will slowly start to feel less tender over time. This can take anywhere between 1 week and 6 months, depending on how sensitive the area is.

If pain is a problem, speak with your hand therapist or doctor. These exercises will not be recommended until it is safe to do them.

Do

- Follow your hand therapist's instructions and tell them if you feel like your symptoms are getting worse.

Do Not

- Avoid touching the sensitive area; this could make the area more tender.

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WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO NOT HAVE TREATMENT?

If you do not manage your hand or arm sensitivity, your recovery from injury may take longer, be more painful and these complications may have a serious effect on your ability to work and enjoy life

CONTACT DETAILS AND REFERENCES

Your hand therapist is_____

Merivale Hand Clinic (03) 3559775

http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/patient information/therapies/hand-therapy/desensitisation-home programme.pdf
http://www.eatonhand.com/hdt/hdt016.htm
http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/Controlleddocuments/Patientinformation/Medicinestherapiesandanaesthetics/Desensitisationpatientinformation.pdf