

St. James's Hospital Therapy Led Clinic

Desensitization

Hypersensitivity is a common symptom of nerve re-growth. It is due to the increased sensitivity of immature nerve endings, to stimulation. The tendency is therefore to avoid using the hypersensitive area because the stimulation is uncomfortable and painful. This leads to disuse of the hand and a habit of non-function, and in turn makes the area more sensitive, (a vicious circle).

Contrary to what seems rational, repeated stimulation is used to overcome the problem. Treatment sessions should be short and often, and the stimulation should be slightly irritating but tolerable. The degree of stimulus should be graded to be more irritating, as soon as it becomes tolerable.

Treatment Programme

1. Massage:

Using E45 or silcox base, massage in a circular motion over sensitive area. If there is swelling, elevate the hand and massage towards the shoulder. Concentrate in the area of sensitivity.

Repeat 3-4 times daily for 3-4 minutes.

2. Textures:

Gradually stimulate the sensitive area with soft non-irritating textures, (i.e. cotton-wool) and increase to more irritating textures, (coarse linen, denim) Select items you find irritating at home, i.e. bed sheets, shirtsleeves.

Repeat 3-4 times daily for 3 minutes.

3. Percussion:

Use a repetitive activity, such as hammering to cause vibration and percussion to nerve endings. Also, tapping over the sensitive area with fingertip or increasing stimulus with biro/pencil. Increase to heavier tapping.

Repeat 3 times daily for 2-3 minutes.

4. Rice/Sand/Barley:

Using a basin/bowl of rice, manipulate hand in the rice, increasing to rougher textures of barley, sand or shells.

Repeat 2 times daily for 5 minutes.

5. Hot and Cold Water:

Take a basin of cold water, with ice-cubes in it and a basin of warm water. Place hand into warm water and make ten fists, place into cold water and make ten fists. Repeat for 3-4 minutes.

Repeat 3 times daily.

USE YOUR HAND AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE