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**ASHT ISSUES ALERT ON 5 COMMON HAND INJURY CAUSES; HAND
THERAPY AWARENESS AND INJURY PREVENTION WEEK,
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CHICAGO, IL, EMBARGOED – The medical specialists who were among the first to alert users about “BlackBerry Thumb” and warned parents about the potential hand ailments kids could develop from excessive video game play are issuing a national consumer education alert on five common causes for hand and wrist injuries.

The American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT.org) is dedicating June 12 – 16, 2006 as Hand Therapy Awareness and Injury Prevention Week and providing consumers with tips to avoid everyday bad habits that can cause hand strains or painful long-term injuries.

“Using common sense and joint protection techniques can help to minimize potential injury or overuse of our hands and arms. Poor daily routines can add up to painful long term conditions unless you take proper care and precautions,” said Christine Muhleman, OTR, CHT and President of the American Society of Hand Therapists

ASHT members selected 5 common causes for hand, wrist and arm ailments and issued the following tips to help consumers prevent everyday injuries.

1. Carrying Heavy Groceries

Carrying multiple plastic bags at once poses a challenge for fingers, wrists and elbows. Shoppers often strain their delicate finger joints or arms lifting too much weight awkwardly. "If you have to use plastic, carry one bag at a time in each hand. It would actually be better to ask for paper bags instead of plastic, and carry them using both arms under the bag rather than grasping them with your fingers," advises Stacey Doyon, OTR/L, CHT and President-Elect of the American Society of Hand Therapists. When grocery shopping, use a cart instead of a small basket, which can be difficult to grasp as the weight of its contents increase. A gallon of milk weighs about eight pounds. Lifting it out of the refrigerator with only your fingertips in the handle can torque and twist the joints. "Always use two hands to lift heavy gallons, jugs and bottles," suggests Doyon.

2. Bagel Hand

Ask many doctors and hand therapists what they believe to be the most dangerous food for possible injury during preparation or serving - Many will say bagels! Thousands of people each year end up in the emergency room from slicing more than just their bagels. According to the Department of Emergency Services at George Washington Hospital in Washington, D.C., the greatest under-reported injury is hand cuts from slicing bagels. Some emergency rooms have even started calling the ligament and tendon damage "bagel hand." Many of these injuries are so severe they require surgery and months of hand therapy in order to regain normal movement and function. "Use a bagel slicer instead of a knife," says Muhleman. "If you don't own a bagel slicer, place the bagel flat on a table with your hand on top of the bagel and hold firmly. Use a serrated knife to slice halfway through the bagel, keeping the blade horizontal to the table. Stand the bagel on its end and finish slicing downward while gripping the upper sliced half. Never try to slice a frozen bagel."

3. Dishwashing Disasters

Another reason to hate washing dishes. "We see people everyday that put knives and sharp tools in soapy water and then search blindly for them. Many of these cuts affect tendons and require surgery and rehabilitation," says Paige E. Kurtz, MS, OTR/L, CHT and Vice President of ASHT. Be mindful of wine glasses and other glass items while washing dishes. "A common injury reported in hand clinics are lacerations to the extensor tendons on the top of the knuckles caused by washing glasses. If you place your hand inside of a narrow glass with a sponge and squeeze the sponge, the pressure of your hand may shatter the glass, causing cuts to the back of your hand," warns Kurtz. Soap up a sponge and place it inside of the glass instead of your hand.

4. Reading in a Pinch

When reading for an extended period of time, whether at work analyzing reports or at home with your favorite novel, hold the book with one hand flat on the front pages and the other flat on the back of the book. Even better: rest the book on a desk or incline surface rather than pinching paper corners and edges. "Constant pinching while reading increases finger and thumb strain and stiffness. Continuously pinching pages can aggravate the tendons and joints in the thumb and wrist," warns Doyon. This also applies to opening packages or tearing open the paper flap on cereal or snack boxes. "Anything that is sealed can pose a problem. Be careful. Use scissors or other tools for these activities."

5. Untreated Minor Wounds

Some of the worst injuries hand therapists see everyday can begin as a simple paper cut or thorn prick that is left untreated. "Untreated minor wounds can carry bad microbes that

flare into dangerous infections,” cautions Kurtz. Wash thoroughly with warm water and soap for several minutes after any type of injuries to the hands, fingers or arms, especially when the skin has been penetrated. Be sure to apply a first aid antibiotic ointment to the wound. “It’s important to monitor even the smallest injuries to prevent them from becoming bigger problems. If an area of redness appears around the wound, or the cut becomes warm, larger or irritated, seek medical consultation immediately,” advises Kurtz.

“Our multitasking lifestyles can really take a toll on our hands, wrists and arms. Most common injuries are caused by rushing around and trying to do too much, too fast. We take our hands for granted until we sustain an injury and can’t use our hands normally to lift a cup of coffee or perform other daily activities that used to be simple tasks. Then we realize just how important our hands are to our quality of life,” said Muhleman.

“A professional hand therapist in your area can help you identify and make recommendations to avoid bad habits and postures before they do long term or permanent damage to your hands, wrists and arms,” said Muhleman. Hand therapists are also the specialists to seek after sustaining any of these injuries. They are the best qualified professionals to guide rehabilitation and maximize recovery and function if an injury requires surgery or other treatment.

Professional hand therapists are highly specialized physical or occupational therapists with expertise in the delicate and essential functions of the hands, wrists, arms and shoulders. For more hand health tips or to locate a hand therapist near you, visit www.asht.org.

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The American Society of Hand Therapists is a not-for-profit organization seeking to advance the specialty of hand therapy through communication, education, research and the establishment of clinical standards. ASHT’s 3,000 members in the United States, Canada and around the world strive to be recognized leaders in the hand therapy profession. For more information about hand therapy or to find a hand therapist in your area, visit www.asht.org.