



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS™

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

## What is a Hand Therapist?

*“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”*

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand



### What is Hand Therapy?

Hand therapy is the art and science of evaluating and treating injuries and conditions of the upper extremity (shoulder, arm, elbow, forearm, wrist and hand). Hand therapy uses a number of therapeutic interventions to help return a person to their

highest level of function. It evolved from the need for a specialist with the knowledge and experience required to manage the challenging recovery of complex hand and upper extremity injuries

### What is a Hand Therapist?

A hand therapist is an occupational or physical therapist who, through advanced continuing education, clinical experience and integration of knowledge in anatomy, physiology and kinesiology, has become proficient in treatment of pathological upper extremity conditions resulting from trauma, disease, congenital or acquired deformity. A hand therapist may achieve advanced certification as a *certified hand therapist (CHT)*. To obtain the CHT credential, a therapist must practice for a minimum of three years, accumulating at least 4,000 hours of treatment for hand and upper extremity disorders. Certified hand therapists must also pass a rigorous certification exam to demonstrate their competency in the practice of hand therapy.

### What Can a Hand Therapist Do for Me?

Hand therapists bridge the gap from medical management of upper extremity conditions to successful recovery, allowing individuals to function normally in their daily lives. Hand therapists provide non-operative interventions, preventative care and post-surgical rehabilitation for a wide variety of upper extremity disorders, from simple fingertip injuries to complex replanted extremities. Patients with chronic conditions, such as arthritis, or neurologic conditions, such as a stroke, can benefit from hand therapy through education on joint protection and energy conservation, and with recommendations for adaptive equipment or devices to improve function. A hand therapist employs a variety of techniques and tools, including activity and exercise programs, custom orthotic fabrication, management of pain and swelling and wound and scar care. A hand therapist can also be a consultant in the industrial world, training employees in healthy work habits.

### How Do I Find a Hand Therapist?

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists website at [www.asht.org](http://www.asht.org), or call 856-380-6856. You can search the Find a Therapist directory by city, state, ZIP or last name. A prescription from your physician may be necessary before you can visit a hand therapist.

To learn more about hand therapy, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at [www.asht.org](http://www.asht.org) or call 856-380-6856.