

Save Your Hands and Wrists

By Lawrence Gold © 2004

Is hand and wrist pain starting to interfere with your work?
Wonder why?

Here's an answer: You get better at what you practice. Every time you do massage, you're practicing tightening the muscles of your forearms and hands. The muscles of your forearms control the movements of your wrists, hands and fingers. Have you noticed that they're getting tighter? Is it harder to open your hands than you remember? It's probable that your work is cultivating tight muscles. It's an occupational hazard for people whose work requires them to use their hands, a lot.

This condition is what's known as an overuse injury. It's called that, but what makes it an injury is that tight muscles compress the joints across which they pass, causing pain and stiffness. There may be no actual injury, just a report from your body that you're overstressing muscles and joints. You may be able to recover your comfort in minutes or hours. (By the way, this is a good exercise to teach haircutters and keyboardists).

For your wrists, the tight muscles are in your forearms. By doing the same motions for hours and months and years, you've practiced contracting those muscles, and now they're very good at contracting -- too good -- and not so good at relaxing, anymore.

By the way, what's true of your wrists and hands is also true of your back, shoulders, and neck.

There's a way out. It's the self-application of the type of movement maneuver known as "pandiculation," as taught in Hanna Somatic Education®.

Pandiculation is an action pattern found universally among animals with backbones. Related to yawning, it has the effect of relaxing involuntary (habitual) muscular tensions and improving awareness and control of movement.

Thomas Hanna, originator of Hanna Somatic Education, discovered how to use pandiculation deliberately, to create predictable, consistent relief from pain from injuries and overstress – such as overuse injuries. He wrote, "An authentic clinical somatic educator is one who so clearly sees what is the case that he can predict with accuracy the overcoming of a specific malady."¹

Pandiculation involves:

1. contracting muscles strongly enough to send a clear enough signal to the sensory cortex of the brain to enliven the brain-muscle connection, followed by
2. a slow, sensuous relaxation, which reminds the brain how to relax the tight muscles

Because we move in coordinated patterns, tensions tend to accumulate in coordinated patterns. So, to get the best result, pandiculation in coordinated patterns (such as those shown in *Anatomy Trains*) is useful. Additional pandiculation techniques exist, as well, including the hands-on techniques of Hanna Somatic Education.

So, the answer to hand and wrist pain is often nothing more than to groom out the accumulated muscular tensions of your work. Recover the ability to relax those muscles. Take the stress off your wrists and hands. It's easy. The following exercise shows you how. It takes about five minutes. Do it a few times each day for a few days.

You probably be relieved at how well it works.

Freeing Your Hands, Wrists and Forearms

If you have pain already, start gently and do a small amount. As your pain decreases, increase the movements to your new comfortable limit. Never force. **This is not a stretch**, it is a coordination and control exercise that improves your ability to relax your muscles, give more slack to your tendons, and to relieve the pressure on your joints.

THE ESSENCE OF THIS MANEUVER: equalizing the effort you use to grip with your hands with the effort you use to spread your elbows apart (Never force this movement or “work through the pain; work within your comfort zone.)



STARTING POSITION: sitting, hands clasped (fingers interlaced) in front of your face, elbows together

1. Squeeze with the fingertips of your index fingers.
Feel the effort. Now, do the same with each of the other fingers. Squeeze and release a few times, each.
This movement gives you a distinct feeling of the strength of each finger.



2. Equalize the pressure of all of your fingers and grip your hands together, firmly. Maintain this grip until instructed to relax it.
3. Spread your elbows until the grip of your hands prevents further spreading.
4. Simultaneously ...



- Slowly spread your elbows about 2",
 - Slowly relax your wrists, so they bend backward.
5. Straighten your wrists a bit by using the muscles of the soft part of your forearm, but keep your elbows the same distance apart.

This action gives you control of the muscles that bend your wrists.

Repeat Steps 3. through 5. until you get no further gain in flexibility and your wrists are bent backward to your comfortable limit. Your wrists bend backward a little more, each time.



6. Relax your hands a bit, so your fingers begin to straighten.
7. Regrip your hands, keeping your elbows and wrists in the same position.

Repeat Steps 6. and 7. until you have fully relaxed your fingers and they are straight or until you reach the limit of your comfort. If you reach an early limit, start over at Step 6.



8. When your fingers and wrists are straight, continue to grip, relax, and push your hands down until your elbows are straight. (Do not force. Work within your comfort zone.)

Your palms and wrists now feel open and relaxed.



NEW POSITION: hands clasped in front of your chest, palms facing forward, elbows pointing forward

(Never force this movement or “work through the pain; work within your comfort zone.)



NEW POSITION: hands clasped behind your neck, palms facing upward



Shake your hands out gently.

Open and close your hands and feel how much softer they feel.

For more exercises like this one, see *The Magic of Somatics* and *The Guidebook of Somatic Transformational Exercises*, by Lawrence Gold. Get another free excerpt from *The Magic of Somatics* by sending blank email to somagic@somatics.com. Lawrence Gold, trained by Thomas Hanna, is one of the original practitioners of Hanna Somatic Education, a method of

teaching and assisting people to get free of their pain and stiffness. He practices in Santa Fe, New Mexico and teaches nationally. Get more information about Hanna Somatic Education at www.somatics.com (inquiry@somatics.com/telephone 505 699-8284).

¹Hanna, Thomas L. "Clinical Somatic Education – a New Discipline in the Field of Health Care." SOMATICS, Magazine-Journal of the Bodily Arts and Sciences, Volume VIII, No. 1, Autumn/Winter 1990-91.