

5 exercises to improve hand mobility

If you find daily tasks difficult to do because you suffer from stiffness, swelling, or pain in your hands, the right exercises can help get you back in motion.

Therapists usually suggest specific exercises depending on the condition. Some help increase a joint's range of motion or lengthen the muscle and tendons via stretching. These exercises are helpful for osteoarthritis as well as tennis elbow and golfer's elbow—but not when the joints are inflamed or painful. Other exercises strengthen muscles around a joint to generate more power or to build greater endurance. These are helpful for inflammation of the tendons (tendinitis) and nonpainful arthritis conditions.

Below you will find five commonly recommended exercises for hand and wrist problems. However, if your hand condition is painful or debilitating, it's best to get exercise advice from a physical therapist. All exercises should be done slowly and deliberately, to avoid pain and injury. If you feel numbness or pain during or after exercising, stop and contact your doctor.

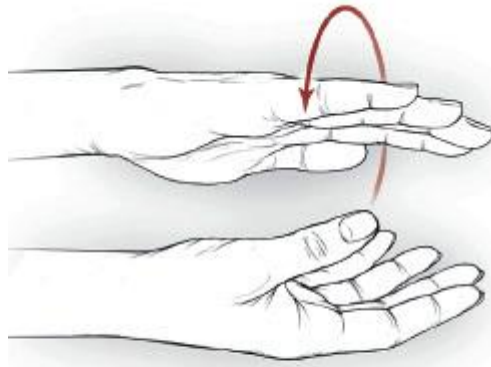
Range-of-motion exercises

Your muscles and tendons move the joints through arcs of motion, as when you bend and straighten your fingers. If your normal range of motion is impaired—if you can't bend your thumb without pain, for example you may have trouble doing ordinary things like opening a jar. These exercises move your wrist and fingers through their normal ranges of motion and require all the hand's tendons to perform their specific functions. Hold each position for 5–10 seconds. Do one set of 10 repetitions, three times a day.



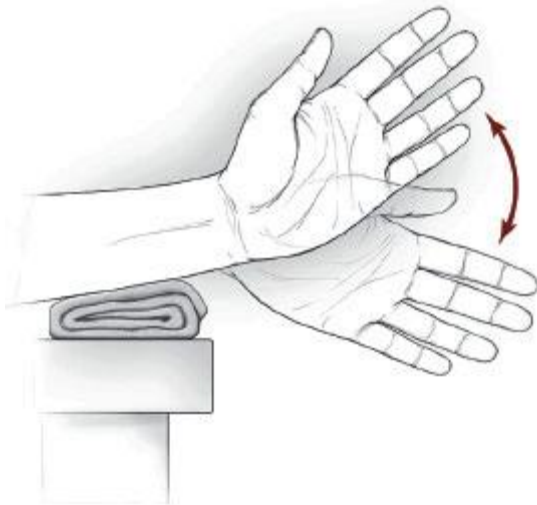
1. Wrist extension and flexion

- Place your forearm on a table on a rolled-up towel for padding with your hand hanging off the edge of the table, palm down.
- Move the hand upward until you feel a gentle stretch.
- Return to the starting position.
- Repeat the same motions with the elbow bent at your side, palm facing up.



2. Wrist supination/pronation

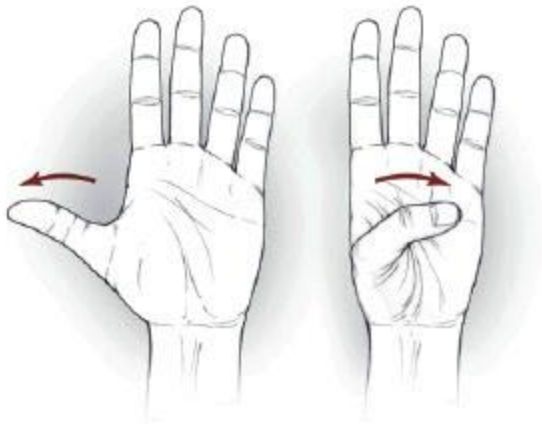
- Stand or sit with your arm at your side with the elbow bent to 90 degrees, palm facing down.
- Rotate your forearm, so that your palm faces up and then down.



3. Wrist ulnar/radial deviation

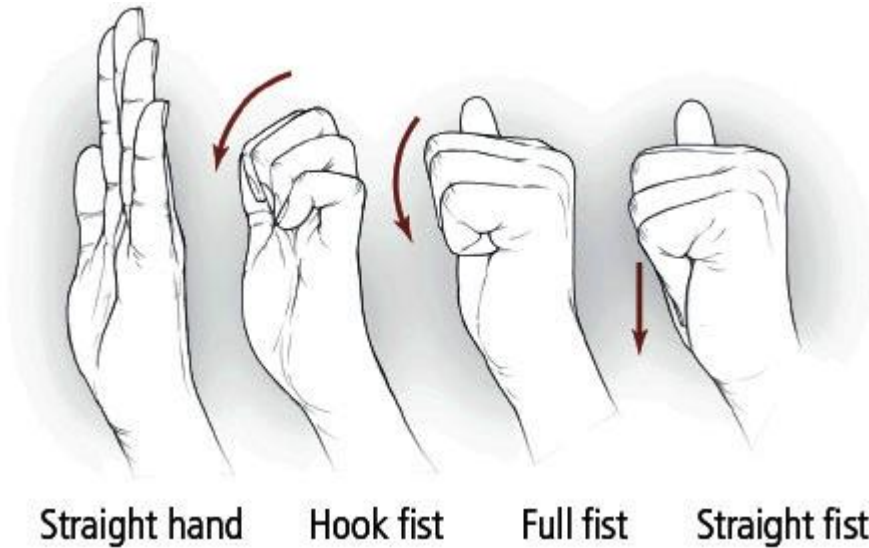
- Support your forearm on a table on a rolled-up towel for padding or on your knee, thumb upward.
- Move the wrist up and down through its full range of motion.

4. Thumb flexion/extension



- Begin with your thumb positioned outward.
- Move the thumb across the palm and back to the starting position.

5. Hand/finger tendon glide



- Start with the fingers extended straight out.
- Make a hook fist; return to a straight hand.
- Make a full fist; return to a straight hand.
- Make a straight fist; return to a straight hand.

For more information on the causes and treatment of hand pain, and strengthening strategies for hands, read *Healthy Hands*, a Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School.