

Atrium Health Musculoskeletal Institute

Desensitization Therapy

After an injury or surgery, the area can be extra sensitive or tender. It may hurt when something touches your skin. These exercises make your hand or foot less tender. It does this by exposing your skin to different textures, pressures, and temperatures in a safe setting. Before starting exercises, use cognitive or mindful strategies (e.g., meditation, aromatherapy, music therapy).

Exercises

Do these exercises 3 to 4 times a day for at least 10 minutes. If the exercises are too painful, use less pressure. You can also take a break and try again later.

Texture Massage

Rub the sensitive area with items of different textures. Start with softer objects and then move to rougher ones. You can try the following:

- Cotton
- Wool
- Silk
- Flannel
- Velcro
- Sandpaper
- Toothbrush (handle and bristle)

Tapping

Dull the sensitive area by touching it over and over.

1. Using your fingertips or a pencil eraser, lightly tap the area 2 to 3 times per second.
2. Keep tapping for 2 minutes or until the area feels numb.

Contrast Baths

Use cool and warm water to lower sensitivity. You can also use an ice pack and heating pad.

1. Fill one bowl with cool water (or use an ice pack). Fill a second bowl with warm water (or use a heating pad on the lowest setting).
2. Dip area in cool water (or use ice pack) for 2 to 3 minutes then switch to warm water (or heating pad).
3. Repeat 2 to 3 times. Always end with warm water or heating pad.

Video Links:

- What is CRPS <https://youtu.be/EYgohjaHNz4>
- Desensitization techniques <https://youtu.be/9fTqE-GFy3M>
- Managing Flares <https://youtu.be/tSUvoV1IDQI>