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F.T.M. Helps Stroke Patients Regain Hand Function

If a stroke, or other neurological problem, has left you with limited function in your shoulder, arm, wrist, and/or hand, then the Functional Tone Management (F.T.M.) Arm Training Program may be the therapy you need. The F.T.M. program uses a revolutionary new rehab device called SaeboFlex to increase hand function in neurologically impaired individuals. The device assists individuals with opening their hand for grasp and release activities that would otherwise be impossible.




"It's most used for folks who have arm weakness or hand weakness after a stroke or head injury," advised Wanda Lowe Ruckser, a private practice OTR/L/Hand Therapist. "It has to be someone who can regain some communications from the brain to the muscles to get the fingers to work, since it is retraining the neuromuscular units to function in the hand," she added. Wayne Sumner has been using the SaeboFlex device for over three months. He has brain damage from central nervous system vasculitis that has affected the use of his right hand, arm, and shoulder. "It takes persistence but I have gained back use of my hand using this device," he said. "My hand was curled up and not much use. I had no control or coordination. With this device I've regained the use of my fingers and hand. It's even helped my arm and shoulder."

The SaeboFlex is a custom dynamic orthosis that features a spring-loaded system. In addition, it is non-electrically based and is purely mechanical. It works by positioning the wrist and fingers into extension in preparation for functional activities/exercises. The user is able to grasp an object by voluntarily flexing his or her fingers. The extension spring system assists in re-opening the hand to release the object. The SaeboFlex is most appropriate for patients who have some shoulder and elbow movement but no hand function (i.e., lack active finger extension). The orthosis will allow patients to immediately begin using their hand to perform functional exercises.

Therefore, unilateral arm training may occur. Individuals up to 20 years post neurological injury can show improvement in proximal strength gains as well as hand function. In addition, the ability to use the hand in therapy or at home has been reported as extremely motivating during the recovery process.





"As a therapist all I did before was make a splint to keep the fingers straighter," said Ruckser. "What is nice about this device is that I can give them function back into the hand." Most health plans cover part of the cost for the splint. "If a patient shows interest I will contact his or her doctor and get an order for the splint," advised Ruckser. "Each splint is custom fitted and Medicare does cover 80% of the cost," she added. Contact your doctor or therapist for information on the F.T.M. program.

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