

PLAYING THROUGH

Healthy Life. Better Game.



GRIP STRENGTH!

Grip strength is essentially how strong your hand muscles are when you squeeze something. It might seem small, but it's crucial for various aspects of our daily lives.

You're trying to open a jar of pickles or carry a heavy grocery bag: if your grip strength is low, these simple tasks can become challenging. So, having good grip strength is crucial for maintaining your ability to perform everyday activities independently.

Frailty is a condition often associated with aging, where a person becomes physically weak and less resilient. This results in decreased muscle strength and bone mineral density. Such deficits increase the risk of falls, fractures, and decreased overall independence. Grip strength can be a good indicator of frailty. If your grip strength declines, it can be a sign that your overall physical strength and health are deteriorating, making you more vulnerable to injuries and illnesses.

Cognitive function is another interesting aspect. Some research suggests that there might be a link between grip strength and cognitive function! It's unclear why, but some studies have found that people with better grip strength tend to have better cognitive abilities. It's possible that there are shared underlying factors, like overall health and physical fitness, that influence both grip strength and cognitive function. Nevertheless, decreased grip strength can be an early sign of the need for intervention.

Now, let's talk about therapies to treat the causes of reduced grip strength and its related issues.

1. Strength Training: One of the most effective ways to improve grip strength is through strength training exercises. These can include using hand grippers, dumbbells, or resistance bands. Regularly strengthening your hand and forearm muscles can help maintain or even increase your grip strength. Whether it is joining a gym or incorporating your own home exercise routine, we all can benefit from strength training.

2. Nutrition: A balanced diet with adequate protein

and nutrients is essential for maintaining muscle strength. Therefore make sure you are eating well balanced meals with sufficient protein, fruits, vegetables, and vitamin D to maximize muscle strengthening.

3. Occupational Therapy: Occupational therapists specialize in many practice areas, one of them being upper extremity conditions. Using a holistic approach, occupational therapists enable patients to maximize their independence in daily activities that require ample grip strength. Some examples of these daily activities include bathing, dressing, meal preparation, cleaning, and more. To address these activities, an occupational therapist will directly work on the required hand strength, fine motor coordination, range of motion, joint protection strategies, and functional adaptations. Whatever your needs are, occupational therapy provides a personalized treatment plan to improve hand strength and function to regain and maintain your everyday independence.

4. Medication and Medical Treatments: In some cases, conditions like arthritis and carpal tunnel can cause grip strength to decline. Medications and treatments prescribed by a healthcare provider can help manage these conditions and improve grip strength. For maximal effects of these treatments, they should be in conjunction with strength training and proper nutrition.

5. Cognitive Exercises: To address the possible link between grip strength and cognitive function, engaging in activities that challenge your mind and fine motor skills, like puzzles, learning new skills, or social interaction may help maintain cognitive abilities.

6. Fall Prevention: If frailty is a concern, fall prevention measures, such as balance exercises and home modifications, can be crucial to reduce the risk of injuries. Yoga, Pilates and Zumba are great, low-impact, engaging exercises that will challenge and improve your balance. Regarding home modification, installing grab bars in your bathroom and removing unsecured rugs can also promote safety and decrease the risks of falls.

-Savannah Thompson, OTR/L
for *The Magnolia News*



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