



**ASHT RE-ISSUES NATIONAL CONSUMER EDUCATION ALERT:  
HEAVY USE OF HANDHELD ELECTRONICS CAN LEAD TO HAND AILMENTS**

***Professional Hand Therapists Offer Tips to Prevent Injuries Caused by  
Extended Use of Popular Portable Electronics***

The American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT) issued a national consumer education alert for handheld electronics users to avoid the onset of carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis and other ailments that may be irritated by heavy use of these devices. The popularity of using the small personal music devices (excessive use of the scroll wheel) or using the thumb extensively for text messaging on phones and other text messaging devices can lead to sore wrist and thumbs and has led to the popular term “Blackberry Thumb”. In conjunction with this alert, the hand therapy society also released a specially designed list of usage guidelines and exercises to help portable electronics devotees avoid painful hand and arm injuries now and in years to come. ASHT is dedicated to representing hand therapists across the U.S. and in many countries throughout the world.

Handheld electronics may require prolonged grips, repetitive motion on small buttons and awkward wrist movements. This combination can lead to an increased susceptibility to hand, wrist and arm ailments such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis. Many handheld electronics users spend hours on these small electronics every day, responding to e-mails and spooling through music lists and address books. These devices are immensely popular and they are getting smaller with even more features which encourage heavy, extended use. More of the population could suffer hand ailments unless they learn to take preventive measures.

ASHT released professionally designed guidelines to foster healthier use of handheld electronics and portable devices:

- **If you have pain during the activity, stop.** Pain is one of the ways your body is letting you know that you are overextending a particular muscle group.
- **Use a neutral grip when holding the device.** A neutral grip is when the wrist is straight, not bent in either direction (not strong or weak). It will allow for wrist motion in a plane where more motion is available in the wrist.
- **Take a break every few minutes or switch to another activity.** Overuse of repetitive motions, such as pressing buttons, can cause tendonitis of the elbow or lead to Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (tendon or nerve irritation).

- **If possible, place pillows in your lap and rest arms on pillows or use the device supported on a desk or tabletop.** This will allow you to keep your head in a more upright position and therefore decrease neck strain. The pillows or desk will help support the arms so they do not have to be held up in the air.
- **Sit in an appropriate chair.** This is a chair that allows you to put your feet comfortably on the floor and also provides good back support.
- **Switch hands frequently** and vary the use of fingers/ digits This will allow the one hand or other fingers/digits to rest and reduce fatigue.
- **Frequently look away from the screen and focus on a distant object** to help reduce eye fatigue.

Watch your posture. People may strain their elbows and wrists by leaning or slouching for a long period of time while working on these tiny keyboards. If you are feeling discomfort or lack of circulation in your arms and hands while working with a handheld device, you could be laying the groundwork for more pain in the future.

In addition to following healthy usage guidelines, ASHT recommends performing the following hand and wrist exercises to reduce the risk of injuries when using handheld electronics:

*Note: These exercises should never be painful when completing them. You should only feel a gentle stretch. You should stretch both sides. Should you experience pain, please consult a hand therapist or physician.*

- Fold your hands together and turn your palms away from your body as you extend your arms forward. You should feel a stretch all the way from your shoulders to your fingers. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Fold your hands together and turn your palms away from your body, but this time extend your arms overhead. You should feel the stretch in your upper torso and shoulders to hand. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Place your hand just above the back of the elbow and gently push your elbow across your chest toward the opposite shoulder. This is a stretch for the upper back and shoulder. Stretch both the right and left arms. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Raise one arm overhead. Bend the elbow. Place the opposite hand on the bent elbow and gently push the elbow back further. This is a stretch for the triceps (muscle on the back of the upper arm). Stretch both the right and left arms. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Extend an arm in front of you, making sure the elbow is completely straight. With your palm down, take the opposite hand and bend the hand down toward the floor. Then turn the palm up, and stretch the hand up toward your body. This stretches the forearm and wrist muscles. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Open up hands and spread the fingers as far as possible. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat eight times.
- Sometimes, gentle strengthening exercises may be used to complement these stretches, to rebalance the muscles in the hands and arms, and prevent problems. Consult with a hand therapist for appropriate exercises.

We are giving our thumbs, wrists, and elbows a real workout with heavy use of handheld electronics like BlackBerries and iPods. It's important to warm up properly to reduce the risk of injury just like you would for any exercise routine.

Listen to your hands and arms when using these devices. Stiffness, discomfort and soreness is telling you to change your routine. You can make simple changes and be much more comfortable and healthier as you use handheld electronics.

For more information about hand injury prevention techniques or to find a professional hand therapist in your area, visit [www.asht.org](http://www.asht.org).

*The American Society of Hand Therapists is a not-for-profit organization seeking to advance the specialty of hand therapy through communication, education, research and the establishment of clinical standards. ASHT's 3,000 members in the United States, Canada and around the world strive to be recognized leaders in the hand therapy profession. For more information about hand therapy or to find a hand therapist in your area, visit [www.asht.org](http://www.asht.org).*