

SUPERVISED VERSUS HOME THERAPY

Moderate evidence supports no additional benefit to routine supervised therapy over home programs in the immediate postoperative period. No evidence meeting the inclusion criteria was found comparing the potential benefit of exercise versus no exercise after surgery.

Strength of Recommendation: Moderate Evidence

Description: Evidence from two or more “Moderate” quality studies with consistent findings, or evidence from a single “High” quality study for recommending for or against the intervention.

Rationale

Routine post-operative therapy after carpal tunnel release was examined in 6 high quality studies. From these, two studies (Hochberg 2001 and Jerosch-Herold 2012) addressed interventions not relevant to current core practices of postoperative rehabilitation. The remaining four studies (Alves 2011, Fagan 2004, Pomerance 2007, and Provinciali 2000) addressed the need for supervised therapy in addition to a home program in the early postoperative period, the early use of laser, or the role of sensory reeducation in the later stages of recovery.

One high quality study (Alves 2011) evaluated the use of laser administered to the carpal tunnel in 10 daily consecutive sessions at a 3J dosage and found no difference in pain/symptom reoccurrence in comparison to placebo.

Two moderate quality studies (Pomerance 2007 and Provinciali 2000) compared in-clinic or therapist supervised exercise programs in addition to a home program to a home program alone. The studies were somewhat limited by an incomplete description of who delivered home programs, exercise/education content and dosage, and treatment progression. Pomerance (2007) compared a two week program directed by a therapist combined with a home program alone and found no additional benefit in terms of grip or pinch strength in comparison to the home program alone. Provinciali (2000) compared one hour sessions over 10 consecutive days of in-clinic physiotherapy comprising a multimodal program with a home program that was progressed in terms of strength/endurance. No benefit was found in outcome when measured by a CTS-specific patient reported instrument.

Risks and Harms of Implementing this Recommendation

There is no known harm to implementing this recommendation.

Future Research

More trials comparing different approaches are needed. These studies should include validated measures of patient-reported outcomes, impairment, adherence and costs. Better description of the characteristics of the exercise and education content, provider and delivery are needed. Studies that address how to identify subsets that need different approaches (treatment-based prediction rules) or targeting of interventions based on different surgical approaches, patient presentations or individual circumstances are also needed.