Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) can provide health benefits for aging adults with certain conditions. Treatments such as massage and acupuncture offer symptom relief for arthritis patients. Massage increases blood flow, bringing warmth to the area being worked, which helps reduce pain and swelling. What about a mechanical hand massager? Would that provide relief as with the personal touch of a provider? Let's discover hand massagers' benefits and how to use them safely.

Arthritis: how it affects seniors' hands

Arthritis is an inflammatory condition causing **degeneration in the joints**. Unfortunately, one in three seniors deals with arthritis and the symptoms and challenges that accompany the condition. Seniors may have difficulty managing joint stiffness, pain, and swelling, which can limit mobility and sometimes cause severe disability.

The most common type of arthritis for adults 65 and older is osteoarthritis (OA). It is also the leading cause of disability for seniors, affecting women more than men. The hands and weight-bearing joints, the knees and hips, are the most commonly affected areas.

Performing daily activities like bathing, cooking, cleaning, or driving can become problematic when you cannot bend your hips and knees or straighten your fingers. Being unable to grip the handles of yard tools or operate small appliances can be frustrating and increase the scope of the effect. These challenges can affect a senior's ability to maintain their independence and affect their plans for aging in place.

How can seniors manage arthritis?

Treatments for arthritis management vary depending on the person. Healthcare providers may prescribe anti-inflammatory medication, physical therapy (PT), or occupational therapy (OT). **Active exercises** to improve hand mobility, finger dexterity, and grip strength are helpful for OA patients to increase their daily task performance and tolerance.

Massage is often utilized in PT or OT as part of a treatment plan, and patients are encouraged and educated to perform self-massage for symptom relief. Massage may be self-performed, performed by a loved one, or by using a handheld massager.

Benefits of hand massagers for seniors

Medication management is a concern for seniors with arthritis, as they may regularly require pain medication to relieve their symptoms. Pain management for seniors with

arthritis must be carefully considered if they take medication for other chronic health conditions. Drug-related problems such as interactions or over-medicating aging adults are a major cause of hospital visits. Given the potential interactions and unpleasant side effects of various medications for arthritis treatment, alternative therapies like massage may provide a better option for seniors trying to manage pain and increase mobility.

Hand massagers are an option for a senior living alone or to complement other medical treatments. There are several benefits of using hand massagers for seniors:

- Pain relief due to reduced stiffness and swelling by improving circulation, which brings cells that fight inflammation
- Increased hand mobility and flexibility by mobilizing the muscles and tendons
- Providing relief from other conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome by increasing circulation and mobility and reducing soft tissue tension and pressure on nerves
- Decreased anxiety is associated with massage due to calming the nervous system, as noted in a 2019 study

A couple of other benefits of massage may include increased grip strength due to decreased pain.

Choosing the correct hand massager

There are several types of hand massagers seniors may consider for treating arthritis.

Percussive massagers are assistive devices. They're also called massage guns due to their appearance. Performing high-velocity, deep-tissue massage, this massager brings blood flow, nutrients, and oxygen to painful areas. That process reduces inflammation through increased circulation and relieves muscle tension. Seniors with bone conditions like osteoporosis or who are prone to bruising should discuss usage with a healthcare professional.

There are also **vibration massagers**, which come in various designs with adjustable settings. These can be set at a lower setting, providing more gentle stimulation to help with muscle relaxation and achiness.

A **rolling massager** may be a large foam-based, wooden, or small metal ball roller. Small metal ball and wood-based rollers are more appropriate for hand-specific treatments. They are simple to use, do not require batteries or electricity, and are less sophisticated than other massagers.

Heating massagers contain a healing element, possibly infrared light, with other functions such as vibration or rolling. The heat feels soothing for aching and stiff fingers and hands.

Lastly, a **compression massager** is a pocket-like machine in which you insert your hand. It heats and applies pressure to your hand while you rest your hand in the pocket. Temporary

compression is pleasing and may be especially soothing for managing stiff, swollen joints.

Hand massager features to consider for seniors

Hand massage devices can offer temporary relief of arthritis symptoms, however, seniors should continue to see their health provider for medical management of the condition.

You should **look for features that are user-friendly for older adults** with stiff hands, such as:

- Easy-to-use control settings
- Adjustable pressure and intensity levels
- An optional heating function
- Vibration, compression, or percussion settings
- Portability and comfortable design

Using a hand massager safely

Wondering how to use a hand massager for arthritis? Here are some tips that support safe hand massager usage:

- Begin with low pressure and gradually increase as tolerated.
- Limit massage to 10 minutes per session with 2–3 sessions per day.
- Avoid using directly on inflamed, swollen, or bruised areas.

- Keep the hand massager clean.
- Opt for a cordless massager to decrease the risk of falls.

It is always recommended to consult a healthcare provider before using any device on your body, especially for seniors with certain medical conditions.

Arthritis can be limiting for aging adults to engage in self-care due to pain and inability to use their hands. Effective pain management is an important consideration in ensuring you get the most benefit from your hand massager, which can include reduced pain, swelling, and stiffness in arthritic joints.

Handheld massagers are an option for seniors who want to supplement their medical treatment for the condition. It is important to note that some medical conditions may respond to or interact with massage machines poorly. Cardiac and cancer patients should consult their physician for approval of complimentary treatments.

FAQ

Is it safe for seniors to use massagers?

Generally, yes, handheld massagers are safe for most seniors. Those who have certain blood, bone, or heart conditions should avoid using them or consult with their healthcare provider before using a hand massager.

Are hand massagers helpful for seniors with arthritis?

Massage can help reduce the symptoms of arthritis, which may be especially beneficial for seniors dealing with stiff and painful fingers and hands. Hand massagers allow seniors to self-massage as a supplement to medical treatment.

What is the best hand massager for a senior to use?

Seniors can choose from several types of hand massagers to use. However, your physician or physical therapist can help you determine the most appropriate hand-held massager, depending on your medical conditions.

Key takeaways:

Seniors can benefit from using hand massagers for arthritis relief since they can be used in combination with medical treatment.

Massage provides numerous health benefits, such as reduced pain, swelling, and increased mobility.

Various types of handheld massagers are available, including percussive, vibrating, heating, compression, and rolling.

Seniors with certain medical conditions should avoid using hand massagers or consult with their healthcare provider before using one.

Resources:

1. The burden of osteoarthritis in older adults.
2. Effect of hand and foot massage therapy on psychological factors and EEG activity in elderly people requiring long-term care: a randomized cross-over study.
3. Machine-based hand massage ameliorates preoperative anxiety in patients awaiting ambulatory surgery.
4. Multimodal non-invasive non-pharmacological therapies for chronic pain: mechanisms and progress.
5. The immediate effects of manual massage of forearm on power-grip strength and endurance in healthy young men.
6. Health efficacy of electrically operated automated massage on muscle properties, peripheral circulation, and physio-psychological variables: a narrative review.
7. Drug-related problems in elderly patients attended to by emergency services.
8. Massage therapy as an effective treatment for carpal tunnel syndrome.