

A Parent's Roadmap to Hand Therapy



What if my baby...



Prefers one hand?



Keeps one hand fisted?



Has one hand/arm that is more stiff?

These are [signs of asymmetrical hand use](#) which is not typical in babies under 12 months old. Your baby could benefit from hand therapy. It is also possible that your baby has cerebral palsy (CP).



How do I know if my baby's hand preference is due to [cerebral palsy](#)?

A clinician may conduct:

(HINE) Hammersmith Infant Neurological Evaluation

(GMA) General Movements Assessment

Brain MRI may be requested by your doctor

Remember:

You don't have to wait for a confirmed diagnosis of CP before starting hand therapy. You also don't have to wait to see a therapist to start early hand therapy.



How do I find hand therapy?

Ask your primary care provider for a referral to a pediatric occupational therapist (OT).

You can ask for an option that is paid for by public health care.

Private sector

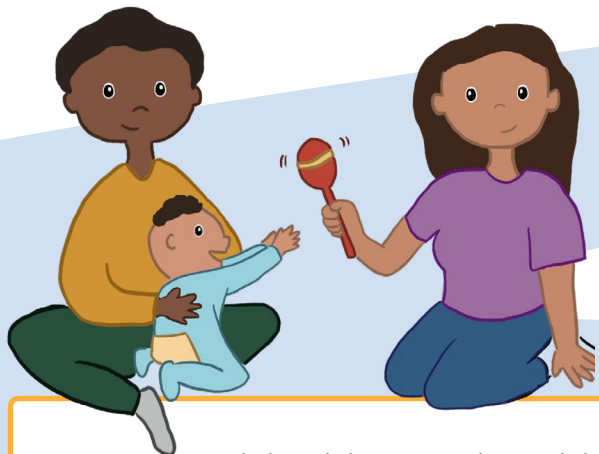


You can also self-refer to a private pediatric OT which may have out-of-pocket fees, although private insurance may cover some costs.

What if there's a long wait or no OT available?



If there is not a pediatric OT who has experience in baby hand therapy, that is OK. Here are [resources](#) for you and/or your OT to explore.



What do I do in therapy?

Early hand therapy is done while playing with your baby. There aren't special tools, toys, or skills needed.

Play-based approaches



Constraint induced movement therapy (CIMT)

Your baby's preferred hand is [wrapped](#) ("[constrained](#)") to encourage the use of the other less-preferred, or "helper" arm/hand.



Play activities focus on one-handed activities like touching/reaching toys, or picking up food. *Constraining the preferred hand is not harmful.*



Bimanual therapy

Your baby practices using both hands together ("bimanual"), like clapping or taking a container lid off with one hand while holding the container with their other hand.

Both approaches can help your child, you can use one or both, whichever suits you and your baby. It may take several tries for your baby to get used to the constraint.

How do I start?



Place your baby in a stable position, like in a baby lounger or highchair.



Sit where your baby can see your face.



Play! Offer toys to your baby's less-preferred hand.

How much does a baby need to play?

30 minutes everyday is recommended, but this can be broken up into smaller time chunks.

What is important is your baby is actively engaging the less-preferred hand/arm during that time.

Where can I learn more?

Instagram: [@therapy4littlehands](#)

Websites: [UCalgary](#) | [Bloorview](#)



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