

# GRIP ★ and ★ GRIN

**Tips from occupational therapists about surviving handshaking on the campaign trail**

**The American Occupational Therapy Association**

The announcement speech is made, and the petitions are filed. The campaign rally and the county fair event are scheduled. In the months ahead, you will be shaking hands with countless future constituents.

At the close of a long day you may find yourself with pain and stiffness in your hands, arms, neck, and back and dreading that crushing grip from an overenthusiastic well-wisher.

Occupational therapy practitioners are health, wellness, and rehabilitation professionals who are expert in preventing and treating conditions such as repetitive-motion injuries resulting from excessive handshaking.

On behalf of our 64,000 members, **The American Occupational Therapy Association** offers the following suggestions for preventing pain and injury associated with the repeated motions involved in a handshake.

## **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

is a skilled intervention that helps individuals maximize their independence in all facets of their lives. It provides health, wellness, habitation, and rehabilitation services that promote independent and satisfying lives. Services typically include:

- Individualized intervention programs to improve one's ability to perform daily activities, including self care, and enhance participation
- Comprehensive home and job site evaluations with adaptation recommendations
- Assessment of skills to perform home management, work, and leisure activities
- Adaptive equipment recommendations and usage training
- Education for clients, family members, and caregivers
- School-based services to enhance educational outcomes
- Psychosocial interventions to address behavioral health needs
- Strategies to promote health and wellness

Occupational therapy practitioners are skilled professionals whose education includes biological sciences and the study of human growth and development with emphasis on the social, behavioral, and physiological effects of disability, illness, and injury, as well as health promotion.



## ★ **Keep in Shape to Go the Distance**

Shaking many hands with fewer negative consequences can best be achieved when you are in good overall physical condition.

- Choose exercises that include your whole body, emphasizing muscles in the back, neck, shoulders, arms, and hands.
- Keep light weights you can use while traveling.
- Do neck rolls, shoulder shrugs, and back stretches between speeches and at the end of the day.

## ★ **Positioning Is Everything**

Prevent problems by checking your posture and the placement of your hands and arms during handshaking.

- Initiate the handshake so you have a firm lock on the other person's hand.
- Avoid pressure on your knuckles by positioning the "web" space between your thumb and index finger firmly against the corresponding space in the other person's hand.
- Hold your wrist straight.
- Shake from the arm, not the wrist.
- Break the handshake quickly, and move on to the next person.
- When possible, use a two-handed shake. Placing your left hand over the back of the other person's hand distributes the pressure more evenly.

## ★ **Take Care of Important Allies**

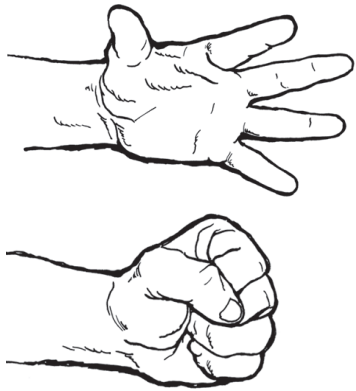
Your back, neck, and shoulders are important components of the motion of a handshake. Protect and save them for the heavy burdens of office.

- Keep your elbow at a 90-degree angle.
- Keep your arm close to your body.
- Keep your arms below the level of your shoulders whenever possible.
- Turn your entire body when moving to shake a hand. Do not turn from your waist if possible.

## ★ Strengthen Your Hand

Activities to increase hand strength are best done before you hit the campaign trail, but these can be fitted into those rare free moments in a busy schedule.

- Flex and extend your wrists and fingers while on the dais waiting to give the best speech of the campaign.
- Keep a foam ball or hand gripper in your campaign office and car. Build up your hands while making those important telephone calls.
- Exercise the muscles that straighten your fingers. Wrap a thick elastic band around your fingers, then spread them apart while straightening.
- Try to warm up your hand first thing in the morning—before the first handshake—with these exercises.

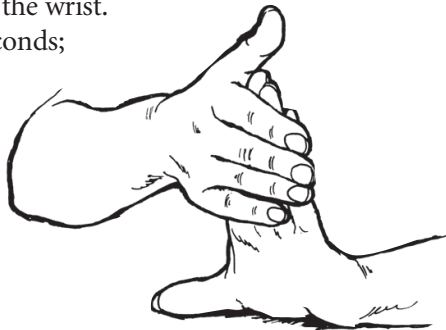


### Full-Fist Exercise:

Open and close hands fully, squeezing into a fist 10 times slowly (over a 10-second period); repeat every hour if you can.

**Wrist Exercise:** Place one hand beneath the fingers of the other and gently but firmly press back to stretch the wrist.

Hold for 10 seconds; repeat 5 times. Do this every hour when possible.



## ★ Declare a Recess

Take frequent breaks. Try these exercises to rest and relax the areas of your body that have been receiving the most stress.

- With fingers interlaced behind your head, gently stretch your elbows back. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Shrug your shoulders. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
- With fingers interlaced behind your back and arms straight back, gently hold for 10 seconds.
- Do neck rolls 5 times.

## ★ The Best Defense Is a Good Offense

If you are already experiencing discomfort, you can apply creative strategies for avoiding a handshake without hurting your chances for winning a vote.

- Change hands. You don't always have to use the same hand. Initiate the handshake with the opposite hand.
- Put your arm around a person's shoulder before they grab your hand.
- Hold something that cannot be put down easily.
- If necessary, wear a splint or brace from a drugstore on your hand or wrist to warn off aggressive glad-handers.

## ★ Damage Control

Pain in your hand, wrist, arm, or shoulder is a warning signal that you need rest and possibly professional treatment. To temporarily relieve discomfort:

- Rest your hand wherever and whenever you can. Use a tape recorder to dictate speeches and to make notes rather than writing.
- Try gentle stretching exercises to increase circulation and relieve tension.
- Wrap an ice cube in a washcloth and hold gently on the painful area for up to 5 minutes, or apply a

cloth-covered ice pack for no more than 10 minutes. (Keep a cool pack in your office and car and just cover it with a small towel.) If you experience numbness, discontinue using cold.

- If you have persistent pain, numbness, or tingling, contact your physician and see an occupational therapist.

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**AOTA**® The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

The American Occupational Therapy Association

Federal Affairs Department  
4720 Montgomery Lane  
P. O. Box 31220  
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220

301-652-2682  
FAD@aota.org  
www.aota.org

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