"Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients."

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is radial nerve palsy?

Radial nerve

Deep branch of the Radial nerve
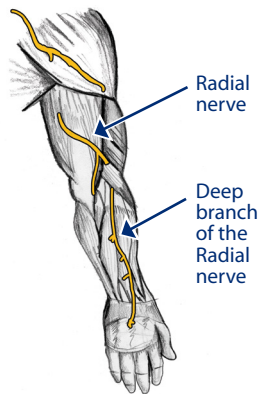
Course of the radial nerve in the arm

The radial nerve is one of the major nerves of the arm. This nerve starts at the neck and travels through the entire length of the arm. It controls the muscles that help straighten the elbow, wrist and fingers. It also provides sensation to the back of the hand. When there is compression or injury to the radial nerve, the muscles supplied by this nerve may appear weakened and sensation may be affected.

What are the symptoms of radial nerve palsy?

Weakness or inability to straighten the wrist and/or fingers are symptoms of radial nerve palsy. Numbness or tingling along the back of the hand might also occur. It can be difficult to release or let go of objects grasped by the affected hand.

What causes radial nerve palsy?

Radial nerve palsy may occur as a result of upper arm fractures or direct pressure on the arm over a sustained period of time.

Direct pressure on the arm over a long period of time, such as falling asleep in a chair, can cause radial nerve palsy

What is the treatment for radial nerve palsy?

A healthcare practitioner may order a diagnostic test to determine the extent of nerve involvement. Depending on the severity and the cause, either surgical or non-surgical treatment may be recommended.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist will fit or fabricate an orthosis to straighten the fingers and support the wrist. The orthosis can help with grasp and release during day-to-day activities while awaiting nerve recovery. If surgery is required, hand therapy can help restore motion and use of the hand.

Custom orthosis used to straighten the fingers and support the wrist

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.