

Constraint-Induced Movement Therapy

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Constraint-induced movement therapy can help stroke survivors regain hand and arm movement – even chronic stroke survivors who suffered a stroke more than 6 months ago! It’s no surprise why this technique has been gaining a lot of attention lately. Let’s break it down.

What Is Constraint-Induced Movement Therapy?

Constraint-induced movement therapy (CIMT) is based on 3 key principles:

1. Constraining the unaffected limb
2. Forcing use of the affected limb, and
3. ‘Massed practice,’ which is just a fancy way of saying ‘lots of repetitions’

Sounds simple enough, right? That’s because it is! To incorporate CIMT into your regimen, all you have to do is restrain your ‘good’ arm while you exercise and practice daily tasks with the other.

Tough Loving CIMT

Constraint-induced movement therapy is a 'tough love' rehabilitation strategy that prevents shortcuts by stopping the use of compensation strategies. Do you tend to use your 'good' arm to compensate for the lack of mobility in the other? If so, that's a compensation strategy, and it could be preventing you from recovering to your fullest potential. Compensation strategies are helpful for getting things done, and sometimes even necessary, but CIMT takes the approach of making things more difficult now so that life can be easier later on.

Constraint-Induced Movement Therapy Exercises

When beginning CIMT, it is important to challenge yourself by increasing the difficulty level little by little every day (this process is commonly known as **shaping**). With that in mind, try these CIMT exercises, starting with the easier ones and progressing to the more difficult ones as you get stronger.

- **Play cards** with your favorable arm behind your back. A simple game of 'war' can be great hand exercise that induces some friendly rivalry, and only requires the use of one hand!
- **Turn the pages** of a magazine with your affected hand. This exercise can be difficult because it involves very fine gripping movements, but if you bend the corners of the page up and fan them out, they'll be easier to pinch.
- **Trace your own handwriting.** (We actually got this idea from a comment that a reader left on a [previous post](#) – thanks Dan!) When you're ready for a real challenge, practice writing with your affected hand by tracing your signature. Simply place an old check underneath a piece of glass or paper and trace your signature using a dry-erase marker or pen. And at the end of it all, you could be ambidextrous!

For maximum results, CIMT is best practiced every day (remember, massed practice) for 2 weeks straight.

Have you tried CIMT in your rehabilitation regimen yet?