

## Hand Care - Thanks to CrossFit Virtuosity for this Article

Your hands tell the truth about you. The strength of your handshake sends a signal of confidence. The calluses reveal your work ethic. Soft weak hands are the hallmark of a weak spirit. Putting your hands on that hard, cold steel transforms the hands and by extension the person attached to those hands.

My hands tell the truth about me. When I am nervous they sweat. When I am lazy my hands are soft. But when my hands are tired and sore and callused, I know the rest of my body has worked and been hardened by effort. I know I have lifted all I can lift when my hands are cramped, swollen and sometimes bloody.

Think about not only how strong your hands can be but also how delicate they are. Consider the ability to sense with your hands differences in texture and temperature, the ability to feel the difference between things that are imperceptible to the naked eye. A musician can subtly manipulate the strings to create music, the surgeon can carefully remove the tumor leaving the healthy organ in tact, and the lover can sweetly caress the object of his desire and convey a wealth of emotion.

While I am proud of my calluses (and all of my scars really), I am conscious of the fact that touching people with rough callused hands is often unpleasant for them. Since touching people is part of my job I take measures to try to make my hands less grizzly.

This is the first of my four-part series on handcare tips. This first article deals with basics of handcare. The next part will focus on rip management and first aid. The third part will focus on how to train with ripped hands and finally a little article on hand exercises for strength and rehab.

Calluses are areas of thickened skin caused by repeated friction and pressure. They form to protect the skin and the structures beneath it from injury or damage. While calluses are a layer of protection and a testament to hard work, excessive calluses can be troublesome and lead to injury. For example, when doing high repetitions of pullups the excess skin can grind between the bar and the hand and eventually tear away. So it is in our best interest to keep our calluses smooth and shaved down to avoid further complications.

There are a few essentials you should have in your gym bag or in your medicine cabinet. First is a [pumice stone](#). These moon rocks are great for keeping the calluses to a minimum. A few minutes with one of these every few days should keep things under control.

The second thing you want to get is a [callus shaver](#). This tool is a little more heavy duty and is good for especially tough skin. If you have some serious calluses or are the type that only takes care of your hands when things get really bad, then you'll want to invest in one of these.

The next thing you will want to invest in is some good [lotion](#). Personally, I hate the feel of lotion on my hands, so I put it on right before bed. You want to keep your hands moist because the frequent washing and use of chalk will dry them out and when dry skin cracks it is painful.

While you're at it, clip your nails. I used to do a lot of Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and one of the biggest no-nos was to have long nails. It's bad enough having someone trying to choke you unconscious but to leave a mark or a scar is just bad form. Keep your nails trimmed.

There are people that work with their hands like musicians and massage therapists and surgeons that will definitely want to follow this advice. Then there are the other types of people that work with their hands like lumberjacks and shop teachers that could care less about losing a finger and they won't care about stuff like this. Either way a little handcare can go a long way.

Please check back for Part 2 where I discuss what to do when you rip a callus. Ouch.

Was this article helpful? Do you have any good handcare tips to share? Please leave a comment and let me know.

This is Part Two of my four-part article on handcare. [Part One](#) dealt with basic maintenance. Since posting Part One, I have received some great recommendations for callus maintenance tools. The first is the [Ped Egg](#) and the second is the [Dremel Multipro](#). Obviously the Ped Egg is a good choice if you don't care what people think of you when they see a pink egg in your gym bag. The Dremel is awesome if you have money to burn or are a hobbyist of sorts and already need one for fine detail work.

This article examines first aid and care for ripped hands and torn calluses. If you train hard doing pullups, deadlifts, cleans and snatches, you will eventually tear open the calluses on your palm. These tips also can be used if you get tears from muscle ups on your wrists or if you open blisters on your feet from running or dancing. The trick is to know how to care for the rips before they put you out of commission so you can get back to training hard as soon as possible.

The best defense is a good offense. **Wearing gloves is not the answer:** learning how to hold a bar is. People tend to overgrip the bar: gripping so that the bar is firmly in the palm. However once there is weight on the bar, the bar will move more into the fingers. If you are holding tightly the bar will move and take the skin with it. Your best bet is to put the bar where it is going to go not where you think it should be.

When lifting or doing pullups, you are going to want to chalk up. [Chalk](#) is essential to training. Chalk improves your grip on the bar. Gyms that do not let you use chalk are not places you want to frequent. However, if you are tied into your contract at your globo gym, then I highly recommend buying [liquid chalk](#) because it does not leave a dust trail. It goes on wet and dries in 30 seconds and keeps your hands dry for a long time. Also worth trying are products like [Tite-Grip](#). It is more tacky than chalk and if you like that feel then it is a great investment.

Your treatment has several phases. Phase 1 is when you immediately rip your callus. Some people will be able to finish their workout with ripped hands and some will need to stop and address the problem immediately. That depends on what workout you are doing, the severity of the injury and your level of pain-tolerance. Let's say you've stopped temporarily to address the injury. Immediately pack the wound with chalk to stop the bleeding and prevent dirt from getting into the wound. You may want to quickly

wrap your hand with tape to keep the tear from opening further.



Once the training is over, please clean off your equipment with some bleach. Most Crossfitters are not squeemish but nobody wants to use bloody equipment. Be considerate. If you are a coach, then you should be following up and cleaning off the equipment again after the athlete takes a first pass. Running a gym requires that you maintain and clean the equipment and wiping off blood and other bodily fluids is a first priority.

Back to the problem at hand (pun intended), Phase 2, cut off the flap of skin with a sterile blade or nail clippers. Clean the wound with soap and water. Now is when you want to get all of that chalk and dirt out. It will sting; close the door so nobody sees you crying.



If you are at your gym, see what is in the first aid kit. You will want to put some disinfectant on the wound. Apply some [liquid bandage](#) to the wound to keep it covered on the way home. Holding on to a cold can of beer will help numb the pain.

Phase 3, once you are home you can remove the liquid bandage by applying a fresh coat and quickly wiping it off while it is still wet. Soak your hand in warm water saturated with salt for about 15 minutes. This is extremely painful but great for healing the wound. If you are really hardcore then just pour a fistful of salt into your hand and hold it for a while. Let the wound air dry for a couple of hours until it stops oozing and seeping.



Another great tip I received from my friend Marieka J. is to make a slurry out of ibuprofen and water. “Take Advil tablets and crush them into a powder. Use a drop or two of water and mix in some of the powder to form a paste. Apply to open wound. It’s a cheap, but highly effective topical anesthetic. The powder can be kept in a small vial, so you always have it prepared and in your bag.”

The Final Phase is the healing phase. When your wound is dry you might consider putting some more liquid bandage on it especially if you are going to use the hand for anything or you can also apply a light gauze wrap. In the evening, put some antibiotic ointment on the wound and cover your hand with a glove or a sock to keep the ointment from getting everywhere. Apply lotion, vaseline, chapstick or antibiotic ointment a couple of times a day to keep the area from drying out and cracking. You should be back to normal in about a week.

This is the third part in my four-part series on handcare. Please read parts [One](#) and [Two](#) if you have not read them already. This article discusses how to return to training when you have torn calluses.

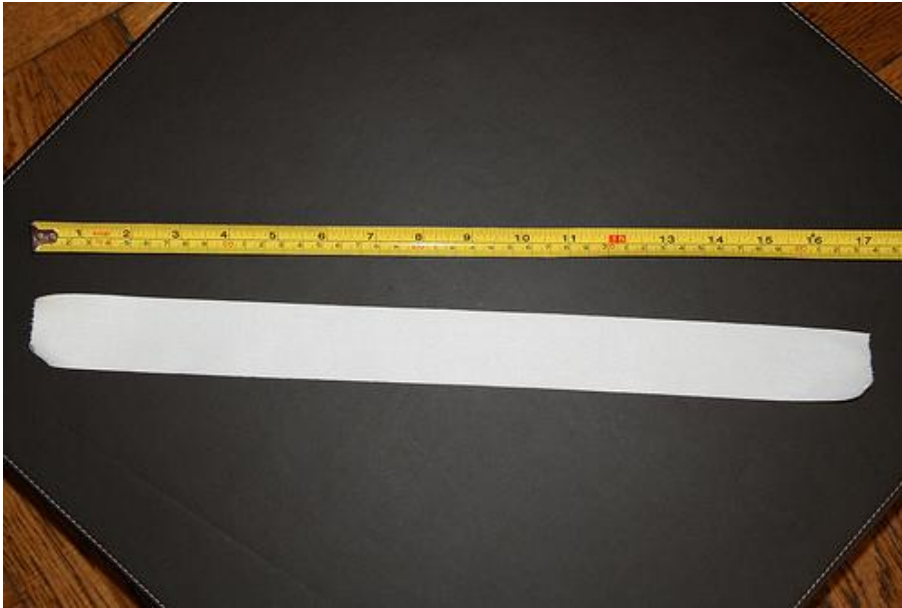
It is important to remember that torn calluses are an injury. Whenever you have an injury, you must give it time to heal. Altering your training to focus on lower body exercises is the preferred course of action. However, sometimes competition and personal factors makes it necessary for athletes to train or compete with an injured hand. What are you going to do to protect your hands and keep from aggravating the injury? Wear gloves? No way!

Tape grips. That’s the answer. I learned how to make these from the guys at [CrossFit Marin](#) and I think they are the cheapest and most effective way to train with torn calluses. We have all tried to simply wrap tape around our hands and had it bunch up and make a mess. This technique will keep your hands safe and allow you to train even with the gnarliest of torn calluses. You might even decide to use these when your hands are not injured just to protect them.

Making these tape grips is sort of like [origami](#) so you will want to practice making them until you get it right. But once you do, you will be able to make them in a jiffy and also be able to keep a stockpile of tape grips in your gym bag in case of emergencies.

All you need is a roll of [1.5” Athletic Tape](#) and a pair of scissors.

1. Take a long strip of tape about 15 or 16 inches long. It depends on the size of your hands. Experiment until you find the correct length. Do not be stingy with the tape because if you make them too short, they will not work. Start long and eventually you will be able to eyeball the exact length.



2. Fold this tape strip length-wise leaving about an eighth of an inch of the sticky side exposed. Having some of the sticky side exposed is necessary for the next step.



3. Take your tape strip and fold it over on itself leaving a little pointed end. The exposed sticky sides should hold it together.



4. Take another long strip of tape about 13 or 14 inches long. This should be about 2 inches shorter than the first strip.

5. Fold this new strip over the previous strip. This extra strip acts as reinforcement and keeps the original strip from splitting in half. Try to cover as much of the first strip as you can right up to the little pointy bit.



6. This is your tape grip. You will want to practice making several of these. Keep the good ones in a zip-lock baggy in your gym bag. They will come in handy.



7. Using your scissors cut just enough of a hole in the top to put your finger snugly through the little pointy bit. Put the appropriate finger through the hole so that grip covers your torn callus. Usually placing the grip over your middle or ring finger works best. Depending on how bad your hand is, you might need to use two or more on the same hand.



8. The end of the grip should come down over the palm to your wrist. Take a third strip of tape and secure the end of the grip to your wrist with a few wraps around the wrist. Do not wrap it so tight that it cuts off your circulation.



There you have it. Pretty simple really. I hope you find this helpful. Now go do some pull-ups!

This is the last installment in my four-part series on handcare. I hope you enjoy it. Please read parts [one](#), [two](#) and [three](#).

Whether you are doing Gymnastics, Olympic weightlifting, Crossfit, or manual labor, your hands take a beating. Your hands and wrists are susceptible to carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, strains, sprains and all sorts of trauma. Doing some or all of the following things can help keep you injury-free and prevent your training from getting derailed. *[Do not worry about bulking up and looking like this.]*

### **Warmups**

Before training, get into the habit of doing a thorough warmup that includes mobility and stretching exercises for the hands and wrists. I really like the mobility drills from [Z-Health](#).

**Shaking.** Vigorously shake your hands. This will increase the bloodflow to the hands and improve circulation.

**Paint the Fence.** Just like in *The Karate Kid*, you should practice moving your hands up and down like you are painting a fence. It is best to move the wrist up and down as if you are being moved by your watchband.

**Lateral Glides.** Similarly move the wrists side to side as if you are being pushed and pulled by your watchband.

**Wrist Circles.** Trace large circles with your wrists. Be sure to try and keep the knuckles parallel to the ground.

**Finger Waves.** Start by curling the fingers into the hand into a tight fist and then in a wave extend them. Then wave the fingers closed into a fist and curl the fingers in and extend them.

**Finger Circles.** Circle the fingers in both directions. Don't forget your thumbs.

**Wrist Stretches.** Stretch the wrists into flexion and extension. You can do this by placing the hands of the floor and slowly leaning your weight into your hands. You can also grab the hands and stretch them individually.

The exercises above are demoed in this video. Note that it takes less than 5 minutes and you can do it sitting down. There is no reason why you shouldn't be able to do it before and/or after a workout and/or while sitting at your desk at work.

### **Strength Exercises.**

The stronger your hands are the less prone they are to injury. Here are some essential exercises that you need to do to keep your hands strong and healthy.

**Captains of Crush Grippers.** These are the real deal when it comes to hand strength. These aren't the cheap plastic hand grippers they sell at your local sporting goods stores. These are serious strength training tools. Closing these grippers is hard and will make your hands and your grip formidable. I recommend getting a "[Sport](#)" or "[Trainer](#)" to start with and working up to at least a "[No. 1](#)."

**Wrist Roller.** The wrist roller is a classic wrist/forearm exerciser. You can make these for really cheap with a [PVC pipe](#) and a length of rope or you can just [buy a cheap one](#) online. Doing some of these every week will keep your forearms and wrists strong.

**Indian Clubs/Hammer swings.** Hammers and [Indian Clubs](#) (Clubbells) are basically long levers with a small weight on the end and that means lots of torque. That torque is great for building up super strong wrists and forearms. If you don't have a heavy hammer or don't want to [build your own Indian Club](#), then load one side of dumbbell and try that.

[Extension bands](#). The finger extensors need some help because we do not exercise them enough and exercising them will help avoid muscle imbalances and keep your hands healthy. [Ironmind](#) makes a [Healthy Hands Kit](#) that is pretty cool. It contains the bands and some eggs. The Eggs that come with this are pretty cool but don't compare to the Captains of Crush grippers. Still they are probably good to have around.

### **Recuperation**

As important as working out your hands and forearms is knowing when to rest them. Get yourself a pair of [lifting straps](#). Lifting straps are essential tools for training but they need to be used at the right time and for the right reasons. Use them for warming up if you know your workout will be especially taxing on the hands. Use them to continue to train when your hands are fried or injured. Do *not* get into the habit of using straps when they are not necessary. Strong hands are earned through hard work.

After a particularly hard day of training you should soak your hands in ice water. Five to ten minutes should be sufficient. If your hands still hurt after they warm up then soak them for a second time. Avoid soaking in ice for more than 10 minutes to avoid frostbite. Remember to shave your calluses, get lots of sleep and take your fish oils.