



Health and Medicine

By: Shari Small

A local physical therapist is giving stroke and brain injury patients a helping hand. Shari Small has the details in this week's Health and Medicine report.

Michael Abbey is re-learning to use his hand; like a lot of brain injury and stroke survivors, Abbey's hand remains clenched tight. Physical therapist Patrick Pinkart is having him work with the Saebo-Flex splint, which has springs that help pull the hand back open.



"This device helps them with the action of opening the hand, so they can re-learn grasp and release motions," says Pinkert. Four years ago, Abbey had a bacterial abscess that required emergency surgery, in which part of his brain was removed. "I went to sleep at home, and woke up in the hospital minus a quarter of my brain," says Abbey.

Although Abbey's right side was paralyzed, he's regained the use of everything except his hand. He says the Saebo-Flex is helping. "I was here for about a half hour and I went home and that night I picked up a nail clipper with my right and clipped the five nails in my left hand, and put the clippers down," says Abbey. Abbey says after three sessions, he's pleased with his progress. "Ecstatic," says Abbey. "Yeah, I'm having a good time."

Chris Finch suffered a stroke almost five years ago that left her completely paralyzed on her right side, and has been working with the Saebo-Flex for three months. "I clenched, you know, but this Saebo allows me to open the hand," says Finch. The device has also strengthened her arm and shoulder, and has improved her range of motion. Experts recommend that patients exercise with the splint at home for three or more hours a day and attend therapy three times a week.

"By high level repetitive motion exercise, they begin to re-pattern in the action of grasp and release," says Pinkart. "That's what really stimulates the brain to make the changes to improve the use of their hands once the splint is off." Pinkart says he understands physical disabilities on many levels; at 18 years old, he injured his neck and was paralyzed from the neck down. Pinkart says the experience led him to choose physical therapy as his life's work. The Saebo-Flex also works for people seeking rehabilitation many years after their stroke or brain injury. For more information, Contact San Luis Sports Therapy at: (805) 543-7771.