



BRIDGEPORT HOSPITAL

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Healthy & Wise MAGAZINE

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Getting a Grip—and Release— After a Stroke

*K*ay Patrick can now use both hands to fold her laundry.

That might not sound like exciting news, but it's been five years since she's been able to do that. Five years since the **stroke** that disabled her left hand and arm. Five years during which her left hand (her dominant hand, wouldn't you just know!) has been curled up in a tight, useless fist.

She had to fold the laundry with one hand; empty the dishwasher with one hand. She couldn't carry a shoe or a saltshaker or a sandwich with her dominant hand.

The problem was, although she could hold objects in her left hand, the hand muscles had forgotten how to let go. She couldn't extend her fingers.

Until three months ago. That's when she started coming to **Ahlbin Rehabilitation Centers** three times a week for 45-minute sessions with Sue Rhode, OT (Occupational Therapist). Sue showed Kay a very new kind of treatment called a SaebFlex (say-bow-flex) orthosis, for use with a special Arm Training Program, designed to strengthen her long-unused arm muscles and to train the fingers to extend.

The SaebFlex orthosis is a colorful, complicated-looking device with wires and springs and joints and finger caps. Kay would strap the device onto her left arm and hand and go through a series of exercises—picking up and putting down four-inch squishy balls, passing them through hoops and dropping them into various containers; grasping large balls on pegs and inserting them into holes, and more. She also did the exercises twice a day for 45 minutes at home.

Each time Kay closed her fingers around an item, the springs on the device pulled them open again so she could extend those fingers—and let go. Simply by using her hand effectively, she was retraining all the muscles in her left arm.

Kay has graduated from outpatient therapy, but now participates in Ahlbin Centers' Community Wellness Program, coming in regularly to continue her remarkable improvement. Moving beyond the scope of grasp-and-release training, she is working on fine-motor skills for delicate motions such as writing her name.



Healthy & Wise content is produced by the Planning & Marketing Department of Bridgeport Hospital. If you have any questions, please contact Judy Demarest at [kjdem@bpthosp.org](mailto:kjdema@bpthosp.org).

Thanks for stopping by!

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This type of arm training is most appropriate for patients who have some shoulder and elbow movement but no hand function. It can work for people who have recently had a stroke—or for those whose stroke occurred many years ago. "I am working with a woman who had a stroke 13 years ago, who is now regaining her grip-and-release skills," says Sue Rhode.

"This program offers hope that wasn't available to stroke victims in the past " she adds. "It verges on the miraculous."

For a brochure about the SaeboFlex Arm Training Program, or for a referral to an expert physician affiliated with Bridgeport Hospital, Fairfield County's most preferred hospital, call us, 24/7, toll free, at 1-888-357-2396. Or visit our website (www.bridgeporthospital.org/Ahlbin).



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