

## Aultman Occupational Therapists Promote Patient Independence



■ Susan Gilbert,  
Occupational Therapist

From wrist fractures to carpal tunnel syndrome, occupational therapy can help many patients restore their independence.

Occupational therapists and assistants address daily tasks patients need to perform such as dressing, taking medication, caring for children and going to work. "We specialize in arm rehabilitation at Aultman Tusc Therapy, whether it's a broken wrist or someone recovering from a stroke or traumatic brain injury," said Susan Gilbert, occupational therapist and director of Aultman Tusc Therapy Services. "We facilitate better use of the patients' arms and teach compensatory techniques they can use to improve their self-sufficiency."

Orthopaedic conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tennis elbow are often aggravated by the way patients perform everyday tasks. "We'll evaluate patients' posture and body mechanics, giving suggestions on how to use their bodies differently or modify their surroundings," Gilbert said. "It may be as simple as having an office worker move his or her computer monitor or use a headset instead of a telephone receiver."

The occupational therapists and assistants work with patients on coordination related to daily tasks. "We have jars to help patients practice opening containers and a laundry basket to teach patients how to carry it safely and correctly," Gilbert shared. "Our overall goal is to help patients be independent and maintain their overall health for as long as possible."

For patients with arthritis, occupational therapy provides short-term aid for pain management. "We also suggest adaptive equipment to help patients put less strain on their joints, especially small ones in their hands," Gilbert said. "For example, there are eating utensils with larger handles that are easier to grip. We provide a joint protection handbook to educate patients with arthritis on what changes they can make and what tools are available to lessen joint strain."

As with any therapy program, patients have to be willing to make changes if they want their conditions to improve. "Therapy is for rehabilitation; it can't go on forever," Gilbert explained. "We set goals at the start of their therapy, and we have to see progress toward those goals in order to continue. We teach patients what they can do on their own to improve, whether it's home exercises or ergonomic changes in the workplace."

During occupational therapy - which averages 3-4 weeks for carpal tunnel syndrome and 8-12 weeks for wrist fractures - staff and patients celebrate milestones along the way. "Before patients start occupational therapy treatments, we complete evaluations of what they can and can't do," Gilbert said. "It's great when patients come to therapy and tell you something they weren't able to do before, such as tie their shoes or button shirts. Little achievements make a huge difference."

### Reducing Carpal Tunnel Risk

Minimize stress on your hands and wrists with these tips:

- Relax your grip, and use less force.
- Gently stretch/bend your hands and wrists to give them a break.
- Avoid bending your wrist all the way up or down.
- Improve your posture.
- Keep your hands warm.

## AULTMAN INPATIENT THERAPISTS HELP PATIENTS ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

After orthopaedic surgery such as a total knee or hip replacement, therapy is an important aspect of a patient's recovery.

Aultman physical therapists see orthopaedic patients the day of surgery or the following day, depending on what the surgeon recommends. "The first three days after surgery are crucial," said Ryan Kuharich, an occupational therapist and director of therapy services at the main Aultman campus. "Progress made during that time frame sets the tone for the patient's recovery."

With a staff of 34 therapists and assistants, Aultman Hospital provides inpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy every day of the year. The group averages 160 patient encounters each day, with some patients undergoing multiple therapy sessions daily. "For patients who had surgery such as total joint replacement, physical therapy helps them get up from a bed, stand, walk and use the stairs," Kuharich offered.

Aultman occupational therapists work with orthopaedic patients on dressing, bathing and general self-care. "We want patients to be functional despite movement limitations or medical equipment they may need on a temporary basis," Kuharich said. "The goal of therapy is to get patients well enough to go home, so they can continue recovering where they are most comfortable."

A patient scheduled for total knee or hip replacement surgery attends preoperative class with a "care coach," a relative or friend designated to help with recovery. "In class, we go over what to



■ After undergoing total joint replacement surgery on both knees, Molly Andrews practices getting out of bed under the watchful eye of Occupational Therapy Assistant Nicole Kuemerle.



■ Jeff Spaulding, who underwent knee replacement revision surgery, maneuvers the therapy stairs with help from Physical Therapy Assistant Beverly Farmer.

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— RYAN KUCHARICH, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

expect after surgery," Kuharich shared. "It helps patients to know what's coming, such as having one occupational and two physical therapy sessions each day."

Aultman Hospital includes a "therapy gym" with a car and stairs to help patients practice everyday tasks. "We encourage the care coach to come to the hospital the day of discharge to see what the patient can and can't do," Kuharich said. "After surgery, patients need to be independent and do things for themselves. However, care coaches may need to help with stairs or getting into the bathtub in order to keep the patient safe."

Even though orthopaedic patients experience postsurgical pain, it is different from the chronic pain they suffered before surgery. "Patients know the postsurgical pain is going to get better," Kuharich said. "They're encouraged when they can do more in therapy every day, knowing their overall quality of life is going to improve."

Aultman offers minimally invasive surgery (MIS) for orthopaedic procedures ranging from total joint replacement to shoulder and knee arthroscopy. MIS, also called laparoscopic surgery, describes a procedure using a small video camera and several thin instruments placed within a patient's body through small incisions. "MIS procedures accelerate the recovery process and enable orthopaedic patients to go home sooner," Kuharich explained. "If they're doing well and making good progress in therapy, some MIS total joint replacement patients are discharged two days after surgery."

After nearly a decade of treating patients at Aultman, Kuharich never tires of seeing patients improve. "Even though they may only be in inpatient therapy for a few days," he said, "it's rewarding to know you've made a difference in helping them recover."

## Aultman Work Conditioning Program Helps Employees Return to Work



■ Patrick Snyder,  
Physical Therapist

When physical or occupational therapy isn't enough to rehabilitate a work-related orthopaedic injury, employees can undergo a work conditioning program through Aultman Therapy Services.

"We use exercises to simulate work activity, so patients can build tolerance after being off work to recover from injury or surgery," said Physical Therapist Patrick Snyder, coordinator of therapy services at Aultman Carrollton. "We also teach patients how to keep themselves safe and avoid reinjury."

Common orthopaedic injuries in the workplace include shoulder trouble caused by repetitive motions and back problems due to improper lifting techniques. "We've helped patients ranging from factory laborers to golf course groundskeepers," Snyder said. "No matter what the environment, we're ready to help when work-related injuries occur."

Patients may be referred to the Aultman work conditioning program through AultComp, a

managed care organization that specializes in workers' compensation medical case management, or AultWorks Occupational Medicine. The work conditioning program is available through Aultman Therapy Services at Aultman North, West, Carrollton, Louisville and Tusc.

After not working for weeks or months, the majority of patients are eager to return to work. "They put forth the serious effort needed to complete our 6-8 week rehabilitation program," Snyder said. "We start slow, working our way up to 3-5 days a week and four hours per session. By the end of therapy, patients should be able to go through a four-hour session without a break."

Aultman physical therapists, physical therapy assistants, athletic trainers and exercise specialists are trained to treat anyone recovering from a work-related orthopaedic injury. "Our goal is to get employees ready to return to work," Snyder said, "without limitations or restrictions."

For more information about the Aultman Work Conditioning Program, call the Aultman Outpatient Therapy facility nearest you:

**Aultman North**  
330-244-8113

**Aultman West**  
330-834-4101

**Aultman Carrollton**  
330-627-6801

**Aultman Louisville**  
330-875-6050

**Aultman Tusc**  
330-363-6215



**THERAPY SERVICES  
and  
FALL PREVENTION**



## Orthopaedics

Many orthopaedic problems need more than one medical service. You may require emergency room treatment, medical treatment, surgery, therapy, medical equipment for the home or intense on-site rehabilitation.



## Heart

Aultman Hospital has been named one of the nation's 50 Top Cardiovascular Hospitals by Thomson Reuters for 2011. At the Aultman Heart Center, prevention is a priority. Our education and risk factor identification programs can help you keep your heart healthy.



## Cancer

The Aultman Cancer Center is a fusion of ideas, technology, talent and compassion. The physicians associated with Aultman Cancer Center evaluate and design individual patient treatment plans based on the type, stage and aggressiveness of the patient's disease.



## Neurosurgery/Stroke

Trauma or illness involving the brain, spinal cord or nervous system can be a frightening experience for a patient and loved ones. Take comfort in knowing you are in the hands of some of the region's most skilled neurological experts, neurosurgeons and stroke specialists.



## Women/Children

Together with our patients, the Aultman Birth Center is promoting and uniting families for life. We take a team approach to providing the best care for you and your baby — under one roof.



## Emergency/Trauma

Aultman's Emergency/Trauma Center, staffed by board-certified physicians, is designed to allow the fastest access possible to the latest in emergency-care technology.



## Critical Care Medicine

Going to an intensive care unit (ICU) can be a very emotional experience, Aultman patients receive specialized care from our Intensivist Program and our dedicated group of critical care nurses, critical care pharmacists, respiratory therapists and intensivists.

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# A JOURNEY TOWARD HEALING



Occupational Therapy Assistant Emily Fawver (left) guides patient Vickie Siebert while practicing work simulation tasks such as scooping rice.

## Slippery winter conditions can lead to falls. Canton resident Vickie Siebert can attest to that, after sliding on ice and breaking her right wrist.

But thanks to hard work in occupational therapy and a positive attitude, she is resuming her active lifestyle.

The fall occurred in March at her home, as she was ending a vacation from work at the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Giant Eagle deli. "I was going out to get my dog and slid on a patch of melting ice," Siebert recalled. "I came down on my wrist and knew right away it was broken."

Siebert's friend took her to the Aultman Emergency Department, where X-rays confirmed the wrist fracture. Siebert was placed in one of two casts she would need during recovery. In April, she began occupational therapy at Aultman Tusc. "Vickie was still in a cast when she started therapy, so we concentrated on her fingers," said Occupational Therapy Assistant Emily Fawver. "I would massage and stretch her fingers. We'd work on range-of-motion

with her elbow and fingers to keep the swelling down."

Once her casts were removed, Siebert's occupational therapy transitioned to work simulation tasks. "She has limited range of motion due to her injury, and that is likely permanent," Fawver explained. "We're now working on strengthening exercises to enable her to carry deli trays, handle heavy containers of food and other activities she performs at work."

Returning to Giant Eagle was a major motivational factor for Siebert. "She's been excited about going back to work from the beginning," Fawver shared. "Vickie put forth the effort to make that happen."

Siebert exceeded her goal and returned to work a week ahead of schedule. "I still have trouble scooping, but I'm working on that," she shared. "I used to whine during therapy, but it doesn't even

bother me now."

For Fawver, determined and positive patients such as Siebert leave lasting impressions. "We have fun, even on bad days, and that makes therapy go faster," Fawver said. "Vickie is a very hard worker. It's been great working with her and watching her improve."

In addition to occupational therapy sessions at Aultman Tusc, Siebert performs home exercises daily. She spreads and bends her fingers, turns her wrist and squeezes a ball or lump of Play-Doh.

Siebert has appreciated her accomplishments — big and small — throughout the recovery process. "I have learned to use my left hand more, and I can even write left-handed now," she said. "I can do little things like pick up dishes and open the refrigerator door with my right hand now. I'm so excited to be able to tie my shoes again. God blesses me every day."

## Physical Therapists Empower Patients to Overcome Back Pain

Low back pain is a common problem among adults. Aultman physical therapists are dedicated to guiding patients with back trouble through treatment, education and recovery.

"Medical literature suggests 98 percent of back pain is mechanical in nature," said Toni Powers, licensed physical therapist and therapy coordinator at Aultman Louisville. "Mechanical causes mean the pain is not coming from serious pathologies such as cancer, infections and fractures."

Physical therapists specialize in treating mechanical low back problems. "Most patients who see a physical therapist for treatment of their backs not only get better but often can limit or alleviate their need for medications very quickly, continue to work and avoid surgery," Powers said. "It's a very cost-effective way to treat back pain."

It is estimated that people who experience low back pain have a 90 percent chance of recurrence. "Physical therapists teach patients how to not only manage pain but keep it from returning," she said. "We know it has a good chance of returning, so we want to equip patients with the knowledge of how to take care of themselves and stay healthy."

For patients with low back problems, physical therapy focuses on everything from proper posture to body mechanics. "We teach patients to work smarter, not harder," Powers said. "For example, patients with back problems should consider putting the objects they use most often at waist height versus below their knees to decrease the amount of strain on their backs. So place that wrench or pan on the shelf at

Physical therapists teach patients how to not only manage pain but keep it from coming back."

— TONI POWERS, PHYSICAL THERAPIST

waist height, not at your feet if you use it a lot."

A condition called sciatica — which is pain or numbness due to irritation of sciatic nerve roots — is a common reason why patients need physical therapy. "Patients often feel 'referred pain' down the legs," Powers explained. "They sometimes don't realize they have mechanical issues in their backs if that is not where the pain is."

In addition to providing treatment at Aultman Outpatient Centers — Aultman North, West, Carrollton,



Toni Powers, Physical Therapist

Louisville and Tusc — physical therapists also create customized home exercise programs for patients. "People are packing as much into their days as they can, and their overall health can be difficult to make a priority," Powers said. "As a busy working mom myself, I feel it's very important for people to know there are very simple things they can do no matter where they are or what they are doing to prevent or eliminate their back pain. It can be as simple as changing the positions they are in often, bending backward after bending forward and using good posture with the help of the environment you're in."

Powers has additional education in the McKenzie methods of treating pain. "The McKenzie method is an applied method of principles and practical applications in diagnosing and treating mechanical causes of pain in the spine and extremities," she explained. "Patient education is a huge component of the McKenzie treatment. The long-term goal is to teach patients how to treat themselves in order to minimize pain and restore their quality of life."

### Preventing Back Problems

Here are some tips to help you prevent low back pain:

- If you are overweight, shed some pounds to lessen the strain on your back.
- Practice good posture and body mechanics, such as keeping your back in a neutral position instead of too curved or too flat.
- Use proper lifting techniques: plan your lift, and lift with your legs instead of your back.
- Adjust your vehicle seat to avoid reaching for the steering wheel, allowing your arms to be slightly flexed and comfortable, and place a firm roll in your low back to avoid slouching.
- Sleep in supported neutral positions for the spine.
- Arrange your office space so your computer is at eye level and you don't have to stretch to use your keyboard or mouse.

## Preventing Falls



Sheree Nuske, RN

Falls present a serious health risk, especially for older Americans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in three Americans aged 65 and older falls each year. Although falls can lead to serious injury such as hip fractures and head trauma, falls are a largely preventable problem.

Falls are the top reason patients come to the Aultman Emergency Department and Trauma Center. "We recognized a need for falls prevention education in our community," said Sheree Nuske, RN, trauma injury prevention and outreach coordinator. "That is why Aultman Trauma Services created a falls prevention program that is free to local churches, senior centers and other community organizations."

The program includes a risk factor assessment, tips on home modifications to reduce fall hazards, exercises to improve strength, a review of medications that affect balance and an open-floor discussion. "I also talk about the weather, as each Ohio season brings fall risks," Nuske said. "You have to look out for icy sidewalks in the winter and wear appropriate shoes or boots. Spring can result in fallen tree limbs and holes in your yard, along with road potholes and uneven sidewalks. Summer sun glare can distort your perspective and make it harder for you to see. Autumn hazards include leaves and rain that can lead to slippery conditions."

Aultman Tusc Therapy also offers a falls prevention program, targeting people with dizziness and balance problems. Inner ear problems can cause unsteadiness, dizziness, vertigo and nausea — all of which can lead to falls and poor quality of life. Aultman Tusc physical therapists evaluate and treat conditions associated with dizziness.

Another fall risk that impacts everyone — regardless of age or health — is the hectic pace of life. "When you're in a hurry, you're not paying attention to your surroundings," Nuske said. "No matter how young or old you are, it's important to slow down."

### Aultman Trauma Services Falls Prevention Program

Available Monday through Friday  
Contact Sheree Nuske at  
330-363-5827 or  
snuske@aultman.com

### Aultman Tusc Therapy Dizziness, Balance and Falls Prevention

2615 Tuscarawas St. W. in Canton  
330-363-6215



### Here are four tips that can help you prevent falls from occurring:

- Exercise on a regular basis to improve mobility. Tai chi is low-impact exercise that may be suitable for older adults who may not otherwise exercise. The Aultman PrimeTime program offers tai chi classes. Call 330-363-6262 for details.
- Medications can impact balance, so have your doctor or pharmacist review the medicines you take.
- Have your vision and hearing checked regularly.
- Improve your home safety by removing or securing throw rugs, improving the lighting inside your home and removing items you could trip over such as papers, clothing and shoes.