

**CLINICAL SKILLS: EXAMINATION OF THE HAND AND WRIST**

*There are 6 main concepts that need to be remembered for ALL of the regional examination of the musculoskeletal system:*

1. **Position** – always position your patient as you would like to examine them before you begin
  2. **Look** – inspect and observe the patient and around the patient's bedside
  3. **Feel** – for example, feeling a joint to see if it is hot or swollen
  4. **Move** – actively (the patient moves the joint) then passively (you do the movements for them)
  5. **Function** – can the patient move their joints in order to complete day to day tasks?
  6. **Special tests** – if applicable
- Wash hands
  - Introduce yourself
  - Ask permission to examine the relevant part of the body
  - Expose the patient – ideally in underwear only, at least exposing the joint of interest and the joints above and below this
  - Reposition the patient – standing up at first

**Position:**

- Position hands palm down on a pillow

**Look:**

- At each joint including wrist
- Ask patient to turn over hands and look at palmar aspect of hand
- Look for signs such as;
  - Thenar/hypothenar muscle wasting
  - Trigger finger
  - Dupuytren's contracture
  - Nail changes e.g.: pitting, onycholysis, nail fold vasculitis
  - Raynaud's syndrome

**Feel:**

- Before you feel, ask the patient if they are in any pain and if so, where.
- Temperature
- Radial pulse
- Squeeze the metocarpal-phalangeal joints (MCPs) to assess for pain
- Palpate each joint separately, including the wrist
- Test sensation in ulnar, median and radial distribution
- Feel for Dupuytren's contracture
- Feel for thenar or hypothenar muscle wasting

**Move:**

- Actively:
  - Prayer sign: two palms pressed together towards the midline
  - Reverse prayer sign: two dorsal hands pressed together towards the midline
  - Make a fist, and now clench my index finger with your fist
  - Put each of your fingertips to your thumb in turn
  - Spread out your fingers – don't let me push them in

- Passively:
  - Move the digits and wrists in turn

**Function:**

- Do up button/pick up penny/use a pen

**Special tests:**

- If carpal tunnel syndrome is suspected:
  - Phalen's test: hold hands for 60 sec in reverse prayer position, which will reproduce symptoms if median nerve is compressed (as in carpal tunnel syndrome)
  - Tinnel's test: tap repetitively and firmly over the palmar carpal retinaculum (just distal to the wrist) for 30 seconds - if there is median nerve compression then this should replicate their symptoms

**To conclude the examination:**

- Thank the patient
- Tell them they can get dressed now
- Offer to examine the joint above and the joint below
- Consider neurological examination of the limb examined

**The complete examination of the musculoskeletal system includes:**

- [Examination of the hand and wrist](#)
- [Examination of the elbow](#)
- [Examination of the shoulder](#)
- [Examination of the spine](#)
- [Examination of the hip](#)
- [Examination of the knee](#)
- [Examination of the ankle and foot](#)