MTIC Basic Hand Exercises for Massage Therapy. By Mark Manton

**Baoding Hand Exercise Balls.**
This Chinese Exercise is an excellent conditioning and flexibility exercise for the hand. It can strengthen the hand, improve dexterity of hand and brain, stimulates reflexes in the hand and when used properly these exercises can prevent injury and rehab the strained or injured hand.

The following link to the Baoding Ball website shows video on using them.

Keep it simple and use the 2 ball exercises, simply circling the balls in the palms for 5 – 10 minutes per day.
On my visits to China I observed several older gentlemen strolling to the park in the mornings. In one hand they held a song bird cage of bamboo and brass with a fine song bird inside. In the other hand resting behind their back on the sacrum, they had the Baoding balls rolling as they walked to the park. Upon arriving at the park they would hang the birdcage in a small tree and let the songbird out to enjoy the early morning while the old men practiced their Tai Ji Quan. When finished the songbird would go back in the cage, the cage would be carried home by the opposite arm and the Baoding balls would be twirled in the other hand, again held behind the back on the sacrum. In Chinese medicine the Baoding balls are said to stimulate the meridians, keep the hands and mind agile and improve circulation in the extremities and heart. Overall simply doing this exercise 10 minutes per day, using items as simple as large walnuts, golf balls, roundish stones and other objects does wonders for the hands and promotes hand health, dexterity and strength for the massage therapist.

Definitely make this one of your main hand exercises. Yan Jing Supply usually has some of these in stock. [http://www.baodingballs.com/baoding_ball_techniques.html](http://www.baodingballs.com/baoding_ball_techniques.html)

**Power Putty / Therapy Putty.** [http://www.rehaboutlet.com/therapy_putty.htm](http://www.rehaboutlet.com/therapy_putty.htm) Use the soft putty. (Therapy Putty, 4 oz of yellow or red putty or try the microwavable putty; Cando Microwaveable Putty – 4 oz, Orange-Soft: )

What we want with this is dexterity and conditioning and the exercises that do the most good are those that use the soft putty for extension exercises. Form the soft putty into a ball and place in your palm. Gently press your thumb into the center of the putty making a hole into the putty with your thumb. Next extend your thumb through the mass of the putty stretching the putty as far away from the center of you palm into extension as you can. Reform the putty into a ball and repeat this with each individual finger several times. Then do it for the other hand. There are numerous other exercise combinations that can be devised for therapy putty. Go online and look at some video demos of therapy putty exercises.

Rubber Band Extension Exercises.
Place a light to medium rubber band around your finger tips, using the rubber band to lightly bundle your finger tips together. With the wrist straight, open the fingers as far as you can and then close again. Do several repetitions for each hand. This can be a good exercise to do while on the phone or while walking or waiting. For more resistance add rubber bands or use heavier bands.

Hand Gripper Exercises.
This is a basic conditioning exercise for flexion. Flexion is usually overdone for hand exercises. It is useful however I prefer to emphasize extension exercises and dexterity exercises rather than doing too much flexion work. We already have dominant flexors in the hands and wrists. It is important to condition them too, just don’t overdo it or as many people do, that is all they do for hand exercise. Just doing flexion creates imbalances. So do some hand grippers to condition the flexors. Get a set of grippers that fit your size hand and are not too hard for you to close. Start with 10-25 reps for each hand. Use the two grip positions shown.
Do 1-3 sets of 10-25 reps with the wrists straight. Then do 1-3 sets of 10-25 reps with the wrists flexed. Then do 1-3 sets of 10-25 reps with the wrists extended. Ok enough of that. Now do some more Baoding exercise. It is good to do the Baoding exercises and the therapy putty or rubber band exercises every day. The gripper exercises only need to be done 2 – 3x per week.

Flexibility Stretches for the Hand and Wrist
There are many choices here. What is important is to make it a habit to do daily flexibility and stretching exercises for the hand. Here are a few websites to try for more on this topic and search for more as there are several videos, pdfs, charts and guides on the web for this. Find some you enjoy and will apply.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_G0RrDVpOZ4
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPO-zST-7EE
http://sites.google.com/site/activecarephysiotherapyclinic/wrist-hand-exercises
http://orthoneforms.com/forms/physical_therapy/homeex/Elbow_Wrist_%26_Hand_Flexibility.pdf

This is a good start on hand and wrist conditioning. Remember your hands and your mind will be your primary tools for massage therapy. Spend some time every day honing these instruments and learning more about them and how to keep them healthy. ENJOY!