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Finger pain and finger cots

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In the last six weeks, I’ve had questions from several people about an odd-looking stitching aid I’ve taken to using: *finger cots*. A finger cot is a thin latex glove for a finger. It is used to keep moisture and dirt out of cuts, scrapes or stitches. They are lightweight and disposable, although I do manage to get two or three sessions out of each.

My need for this aid developed about a year ago. I started having pain and swelling in the thumb of my stitching hand that didn’t go away overnight. When I was unable to stitch for several days, it went away. Although it improved when I took Alleve or other anti-inflammatory drugs, it seemed crazy to take a systemic medication for a localized problem. I tried aspercreme, massage, cold, and heat – each of which helped somewhat but didn’t cure the problem.

I finally decided to treat the cause and not the symptom. After some thought, I concluded that the pain was a repetitive stress injury arising from squeezing the needle between thumb and index finger. The problem was worse when a project required heavy threads, such as multiple plies of wool. I tried several things that would improve my grip and require less pressure on my thumb: rubber finger tips from OfficeMax; Thimble-Its finger pads; and finally various kinds of tape wrapped around the pad of my thumb. All improved my grip somewhat, but they also decreased my ability to feel and control the needle.

While falling asleep one night, I realized that what I needed was a thin layer of rubber that would fit over my thumb like a sleeve. Ideally, it would provide friction without a loss of sensation. I set off for the pharmacy, determined to order a large box of latex gloves, which I planned to mutilate by cutting off the finger tips. When I explained my intention to the pharmacist as part of trying to place the order, he asked “why don’t you use finger cots”? Silly me! I’d never heard of them!

They’ve proven to be invaluable. I now wear them on both thumbs, and can stitch pain-free for hours. I order them from the pharmacy in bags of 100 in the size I need. You can purchase them off the shelf, but they’re generally a mixture of sizes. The cost when ordered is about 2.5 cents each.

As with any good story, there's a moral here: just about anyone you encounter is a potential stitching consultant. Don't allow yourself to think that what you do for enjoyment is a bore to others!

About the author: Denise has served on the Board of the St. Louis Gateway Chapter ANG as Newsletter Editor, Program Director, and President. In 2002, she chaired the ANG Workshop By Mail program, and in 2003-2004 served as the ANG Director for Educational Services. She is a contributor to the 2002 ANG Chapter Handbook, and the 2003 and 2005 ANG Chapter Project Books. She welcomes your comments and questions at denise@beusen.net.