

Owed to the Fingers

By Steven C. Cramer, MD

Fingers make our lives go around

They snap and tap out daily sounds

They wave on a fetal ultrasound

And lower a coffin to the ground

They peel and poke and prod and pluck

And point with glee at a digger truck

They hide your mouth when you're awestruck

And clink a flute filled with cold duck

They scoop ear wax and press thumb tacks

They flick on lights when you ride Amtrak

They hyperextend for a knuckle crack

After I go first, yours scratch my back

How many fingers has woman or man?

It's a timeless, puzzling conundrum

Do most folks have five on each hand

Or four fingers plus one thumb?

Either way, let's say, hail to the thumb

Trapezium's crowning jewel

In the corner, Jack Horner's best plum-pulling tool

Unique among digits, it has its own rule

Thumbs up from Bill Clinton, right after he lied

Thumbs down from Nero: "That man must die"

Thumb out, from the curb: "Can I have a ride?"

Thumb your nose if bellicose and find you're tongue-tied

Index finger will plug a dyke, if it fits

In court rooms it points out the guilty culprits
In front of pursed lips it says hush now a bit
Taps twice on your temples to show you get it

The finger that's third, midway through this herd
Displayed all alone means I flip you the bird
But add in its neighbor then peace is the word
When braided, good luck (or a lie has occurred)

A solo by others is typically rare
Though pinky alone can promise and swear
On ring fingers, wedding bands, with much fanfare

Are placed for the bride and her husband to wear

Fingers are best when they work in a team
Like Fernando Sor picked by Julian Bream
They signal "OK" when you're offered ice cream
And write a prescription for cefotaxime

Together they're vital to do Jujutsu
Let basketball refs show "Foul by 3 2"
Mock slice through your neck to show that you're
through
And type up the words of this poem for you

About the Author



Steven C. Cramer, MD is a Professor of Neurology and the Susan and David Wilstein Chair in Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is also the Director of Research at California Rehabilitation Institute, co-PI of the NIH StrokeNet clinical trials network, Associate Editor at Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair, and a Section Editor at the journal Stroke. Dr. Cramer graduated with Highest Honors from University of California, Berkeley; received his medical degree from University of Southern California; did a residency in internal medicine at UCLA; and did a residency in neurology plus a fellowship in cerebrovascular disease at Massachusetts General Hospital. He also earned a Masters Degree in Clinical Investigation from Harvard Medical School.

His research focuses on neural repair after central nervous system injury in humans, with an emphasis on stroke and on recovery of movement. Treatments examined include robotics, cellular therapies, a monoclonal antibody, brain stimulation, drugs, and telehealth methods. A major emphasis is on translating new drugs and devices to reduce disability after stroke, and on developing biomarkers to individualize therapy for each person's needs. Dr. Cramer has received the Stroke Rehabilitation Award from the American Heart Association, the Barbro B. Johansson Award in Stroke Recovery from the World Stroke Organization, the Award for Excellence in Post-Acute Stroke Rehabilitation from the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, and the Outstanding Neurorehabilitation Clinician Scientist Award from the American Society of Neurorehabilitation. He also co-edited the book "Brain Repair after Stroke," and is the author of over 300 manuscripts.