

## De Quervain's Tenosynovitis



## What is de Quervain's tenosynovitis?

De Quervain's tenosynovitis is a painful condition affecting the tendons located on the thumb side of your wrist. A tendon is a strong band of tissue that attaches muscle to bone. A sheath, or covering, surrounds the tendons that go to your thumb. Tenosynovitis is an irritation of this sheath.

## How does it occur?

De Quervain's tenosynovitis usually occurs from overusing your thumb or wrist, especially in activities that move your thumb directly away from your wrist such as hammering.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain when you move your thumb or wrist.
- Pain when you make a fist.
- Swelling and tenderness on the thumb side of your wrist.
- Feeling or hearing creaking as the tendon slides through its sheath.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor can examine your wrist and thumb and find the areas that are tender and painful to move. An X-ray may be taken to be sure you don't have a broken bone.

## How is it treated?

Initial treatments should include:

- Placing an ice pack on your thumb and wrist for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 or 4 hours until the pain goes away. **(Do not put ice directly next to skin as it may cause ice burn.)**
- Doing ice massage for 5 to 10 minutes several times a day.
- Wearing a splint that will cover your wrist and thumb. It is important that you protect your thumb and wrist from activities that worsen your pain.
- Taking an anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen.

You need to stop doing or reduce the activities that cause pain until the tendon has healed. If you continue doing activities that cause pain, your symptoms will return and it will take longer to recover.

Rehabilitation exercises will help speed your recovery and prevent the problem from returning:

You may do these exercises when the initial pain is gone. If the exercises make the pain worse then reduce the number of times you do the exercises. **If at any time your symptoms change or worsen you must stop any exercises / self-management and consult your doctor.**

### **Opposition stretch:**

Rest your hand on a table, palm up. Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of your little finger. Hold this position for 6 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



Opposition stretch

### **Wrist stretch:**

With one hand, help to bend the opposite wrist down by pressing the back of your hand and holding it down for 15 to 30 seconds. Next, stretch the hand back by pressing the fingers in a backward direction and holding it for 15 to 30 seconds. Keep your elbow straight during this exercise. Do 3 sets on each hand.



Wrist stretch

## **How long will the effects last?**

Recovery depends on many factors. A mild injury may recover within a few weeks, whereas a severe injury may take 6 weeks or longer to recover.

## **What happens if it does not settle?**

If things are not settling after 4-6 weeks you should see your doctor. There are a number of things your doctor may arrange for you:

- A Physiotherapy referral.
- A steroid injection around the tendon – the results of which are good but should not be used in everyone, as there is a slight risk of rupturing the tendon.
- Surgery can be considered for those who fail to respond to injection.

## References

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