

Patient information

De Quervains Tenosynovitis

What is De Quervain's Tenosynovitis?

De Quervain's Tenosynovitis is an irritation to the tendons around the thumb, causing pain and tenderness in this area. Tendons connect muscle to bone; the thumb tendons sit inside a sheath, which is a tunnel like structure. Repetitive movements can cause irritation, thickening and swelling, which can restrict movement, or make movement painful.

The condition is not harmful and is usually associated with overuse of gripping movements involving the thumb and wrist. Examples of these activities include garden work, playing racquet sports, or lifting your baby (sometimes referred to as 'mummy thumb'). It is most common in women between the ages of 30 to 55, however anyone can experience this.

Symptoms can include

- Pain and tenderness over the outside of the thumb
- Painful thumb movements
- Pain on gripping and lifting activities and occasionally at night
- Clicking or snapping feeling
- Swelling

Anatomy

- **The tendons of the 1st extensor compartment are affected – Extensor Pollicis Brevis and Abductor Pollicis Longus.**
- These form one side of what is commonly referred to as the 'anatomical snuffbox'.
- The other side of the 'snuffbox' is not affected in De Quervains (extensor pollicis longus).

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made based on pain location and presentation. A clinician will take your history of symptoms and will carry out tests to confirm this.

Management

Settle pain and swelling → Restore movement → Return to normal function

Treatment depends on the history of your symptoms and daily activities. This includes a combination of rest, medical management, and splinting as required.

1. Anti-inflammatory topical gels, ice or oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications.
2. Changes to activity – Try to avoid or modify the activities that aggravate your symptoms initially, and then work with your clinician to progressively make these movements stronger.
3. Thumb Splints - These can be purchased online or in your local pharmacy, and worn during flare ups to keep the thumb supported in a neutral position.



Physiotherapy

If your pain has settled, but your hand has not regained its normal function, you can be referred to physiotherapy. They will use a variety of treatments, including exercise, to help gliding of the tendons in the sheath. The aim is to restore the tendons ability to tolerate load and return to normal activity.

What can I expect if my symptoms are not settling?

It usually takes a few weeks before there is any noticeable improvement with conservative management. If above treatment fails to improve your symptoms, a corticosteroid injection or (rarely) a surgical option can be explored:

1. **Steroid injection** - This can be offered if your symptoms are not settling through conservative treatment, and can provide rapid pain relief. There are however associated risks, such as infection, tendon weakening and nerve damage.
2. **Surgery** - A small incision is made at the base of the thumb to make more room for the tendons to glide freely. It is performed under general anaesthetic, and you are likely to go home on the same day.

Post-operative care

A dressing is applied for 48 hours after surgery, and stitches remain in place for 2 weeks (unless absorbable sutures used). You will be encouraged to perform gentle exercises to restore movement as pain allows in first days postoperatively but avoid heavy lifting or pulling until stiches are removed. The associated risks of surgery include infection, pain, nerve damage, a prominent scar or recurrence of pain and symptoms.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

It is important to prepare for an operation to reduce the risks of complications. There is information about how to do this at: www.cpoc.org.uk/patients or ask your healthcare provider to download and print 'Fitter Better Sooner' for you from: www.cpoc.org.uk/documents/preparing-your-body

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

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