

DE QUERVAIN'S TENOSYNOVITIS

De Quervain's Tenosynovitis is a condition that causes pain on the thumb side of your wrist. The discomfort comes from irritation of the tendons that help move your thumb. Tendons are cord-like tissues that connect muscle to bone and help your fingers and thumb move.

These tendons travel through a small tunnel near the wrist. When the lining of that tunnel thickens or there is extra soft tissue in that space, the tunnel becomes tight. As the tendons glide through this narrowed area, it can cause pain, especially with gripping, lifting, or twisting motions.

Possible Causes

The exact cause of De Quervain's Tenosynovitis is not always known, but several factors are thought to contribute. Repetitive use of the hand and thumb—whether from work, sports, hobbies, or caring for children—can irritate the tendons over time. Hormonal changes and swelling or fluid retention in the tissues can also play a role. Many new mothers notice symptoms starting about four to six weeks after delivery, likely due to a combination of lifting the baby frequently, hormonal shifts, and normal fluid changes that occur after pregnancy.

Signs and symptoms

People with De Quervain's Tenosynovitis often notice pain and sometimes swelling at the base of the thumb or along the thumb side of the wrist. The pain may feel sharp, aching, or throbbing, and it often worsens with activities like lifting, gripping, wringing out a towel, or twisting a jar lid. The area may be tender to touch, and certain thumb movements can feel uncomfortable or limited. These symptoms can occur in adults of any age.

Treatment Options

Treatment is aimed at reducing pain and irritation while helping you return to your usual activities. Your provider may recommend wearing a splint that limits movement of your thumb and wrist, allowing the irritated tendons

to rest and heal. Medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen can be used to help decrease pain and swelling. In some cases, a cortisone-type steroid injection is given into the tendon compartment to reduce inflammation. Some patients experience long-lasting relief after one or more injections, although results vary from person to person.

As symptoms improve, your provider may suggest hand or occupational therapy. A therapist can guide you through exercises to improve strength and stability in the wrist and thumb, and help you adjust how you use your hand so you rely more on larger joints and muscle groups rather than overusing the irritated area. Therapy may include specific exercises such as isometrics, weight-bearing activities, and proprioceptive (joint-awareness) exercises designed to support healing and reduce the chance of symptoms returning.

If non-surgical treatments are not enough to relieve your pain, your surgeon may talk with you about a minor surgical procedure. During this procedure, the tight tunnel around the tendons is carefully opened to create more space. This allows the tendons to glide more freely and can reduce or eliminate pain. Your surgeon will help you consider the benefits and risks based on your symptoms, activity level, and overall health.

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