

Practice Plus Group MSK, Buckinghamshire

De Quervain's tenosynovitis



What is De Quervain's tenosynovitis?

De Quervain's tenosynovitis is a painful condition affecting the tendons on the thumb side of the wrist. There is a sheath that covers these tendons and tenosynovitis is irritation and inflammation of this sheath.

How does it occur?

Often the cause of the pain is unknown.

Overusing the tendon with repetitive movements of the thumb can make the pain and swelling worse. It may also be brought on by a simple strain. It is common in mothers on young children.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

1. Pain with activities such as pinching, grasping or wringing
2. Pain with lifting
3. Swelling and tenderness around the base of the thumb

How is it diagnosed?

An examination by a doctor or a physiotherapist will determine the area that is tender and painful to move. The Finklestein test is a simple way of diagnosing De Quervain's.

You start by placing the thumb in the palm of your hand towards your little finger. Make a fist around your thumb and then flex the wrist downwards towards your little finger. The test is positive if it is painful.



How is it treated?

- Avoid activities that are painful as much as you can.
- Ice therapy – place an ice pack on your thumb and wrist for 20 minutes every 3-4 hours. Do not put ice directly next to the skin as it may cause an ice burn.
- Wearing a thumb spica splint may help. These splints can be obtained from a pharmacy or online. The splint must immobilise the thumb as well as strapping around the wrist.
- Anti-inflammatory medication may be helpful. You will need to speak to your GP or pharmacist for further advice.
- Physiotherapy exercises can help to restore the movement and strengthen the muscles around the thumb.
- In cases that do not improve a steroid injection may be considered.
- Surgical decompression of the tendon tunnel will be considered if all other treatment has not helped.



Rehabilitation

Exercise can be used to help to reduce pain.

Repeat each exercise 5-10 times depending on severity of pain. Repeat each exercise 2-3 times during the day.

Stage 1

Exercise 1

The affected hand is placed palm facing down on a table. Using the other hand gently lift the thumb away from the table. Hold it there for seconds and then lower it gently back to the table.



Exercise 2

Place your affected hand sideways with the little finger in contact with the table. Using the other hand move the thumb away from the fingers. Hold it there for 5 seconds and then lower it gently back to the start position.

Exercise 3

Support your forearm on the table with your wrist on the edge of the table and thumb pointing upwards. Slowly lower the wrist towards the floor until you start to feel a stretch at the base of the thumb. Use the other hand to return the wrist to the start position.



Stage 2

Once Stage 1 exercises become pain free you can begin these exercises.

Exercise 4

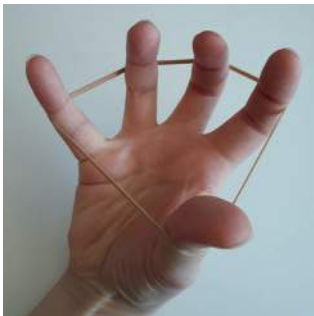
Place your hand flat on the table. Keep your hand still and move your thumb out to the side as far as it feels comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds and then return to the starting position.



Exercise 5

Place your hand flat on the table. Lift the thumb away from the table as far as it feels comfortable.

Stage 3



Exercise 6

Place an elastic band around your fingers and gently moving your thumb against the resistance of the band.

Symptoms should start to improve within six weeks.

If things are not improving you should see your doctor. Your doctor can arrange a referral to:

1. A physiotherapist
2. A musculoskeletal specialist who may consider steroid injection.

Surgery is only considered for those that do not respond to conservative treatment.

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