

# Managing De Quervain's syndrome

Hands, Burns and Plastics Therapy

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Information for Patients

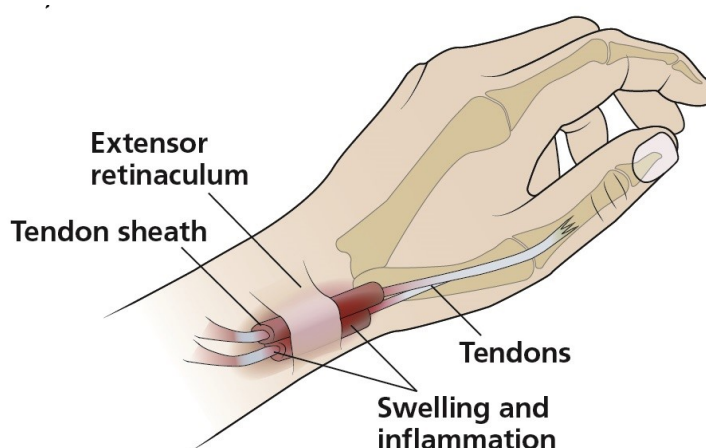
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## Introduction

This leaflet will describe De Quervain's syndrome. It will help you understand why your wrist may be painful and to help you manage the symptoms.

## What is De Quervain's?

De Quervain's is a condition that causes the sheath (outer layer of tendon) to become thickened. This is around 2 of the tendons that move the thumb. It causes pain on the thumb side of the wrist when using the hand.



Tendons attach muscle to bone. When the muscle contracts it pulls on the tendon to move the thumb. The tendons affected are:

- Abductor Pollicis Longus (APL): The tendon that moves the thumb sideways away from the palm.
- Extensor Pollicis Brevis (EPB): One of the tendons that helps to lift the thumb up.

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## What causes De Quervain's?

The cause of De Quervain's is not known. You may have a risk of developing it if you:

- Overuse the tendons. It often affects people doing forceful and sustained gripping and / or repetitive thumb and wrist movements.
- Have a sudden increase in activity levels like doing DIY, starting a new sport or gardening.
- Are a pregnant woman. New mother's are more likely because of hormonal changes before and after pregnancy. There is more of a demand on the hands like lifting the newborn and changing nappies and more.
- Have inflammatory arthritis.

## What are the signs and symptoms of De Quervain's?

- Pain at the base of the thumb near the wrist.
- Pain can travel upwards towards the forearm.
- There may be swelling or a firm lump around the painful area.
- Pain is often worse with activities like wringing out cloths, opening jars, using scissors.
- Pain is often worse on bending the thumb towards the base of the little finger or forced straightening of the thumb.

## How is De Quervain's diagnosed?

We make a diagnosis by listening to you describe the symptoms. We then do a simple test.

We will ask you to bend the thumb towards the base of the little finger while at the same time also bending the wrist in the same direction. This will cause a sharp pain if you have the condition.

If clinical tests are unclear a doctor may consider referring you for an Ultrasound scan. This is not always needed.

## Will I need surgery?

We can often treat De Quervain's without the need for surgery.

## Treatments without surgery

The aim of treatment is to restore function and resolve the pain. This may include rest, splinting, modifying activities, soft tissue massage, exercise, use of heat and/ or cold or a steroid injection by the doctor.

### Rest

Do not do things that make the pain worse. When the pain goes away, you can try doing those things again. Begin to do them slowly and bit by bit.

## Wearing a splint

The tendons can be further rested by wearing a splint. This should be one that limits both the movement of the thumb and wrist. This can be a plastic one made by your therapist or an 'off the shelf' one that is fitted. If you are given a splint you can expect to wear it for up to 4 to 6 weeks. Your therapist will advise you on when and how long to wear it for. They will tell you when it might be best to wean out from it.



## Changes to daily actions

- Take regular breaks during gripping activities.
- If using a computer mouse, move the shoulder rather than the wrist.
- When stirring, move the shoulder rather than the wrist.
- Avoid keeping the thumb out straight for a long time.
- When using a mobile phone, use the first finger rather than the thumb.

## Soft tissue massage

- Do stroking movements up the arm from the wrist.
- Use the non affected hand to massage move the muscles of the forearm near the elbow.

## Exercise

Your therapist will advise you on what exercises to do, how often and how many. They may give you different exercises depending on what stage you are at in your recovery.

## Heat and Ice

A heat pack placed on the muscles of the forearm can be used to relax the muscles. Using ice around the painful area at the wrist may also help reduce pain. Make sure you place a towel directly over the skin to protect it.

## Over the counter pain relief

Anti-inflammatories, topical pain relief creams / gels may help to control symptoms. Ask your pharmacist or GP for advice.

## Steroid injection

If you are under the care of a consultant or doctor you may be offered a steroid injection into the tendon sheath. This may be used with the above treatments or if the other treatments have not worked.

## Special Instructions

### Splint Use / Wearing schedule:

### Exercises:

If you have any more questions then please contact your therapist on:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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Previous reference:

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