



University of Michigan
Health System

This information is approved and/or reviewed by U-M Health System providers but it is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for medical treatment. You should speak to your physician or make an appointment to be seen if you have questions or concerns about this information or your medical condition.

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 skiing or 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 healthcare provider will 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?

The initial treatment for de Quervain's tenosynovitis is 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.

Treatment may also 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.
- Doing ice massage for 5 to 10 minutes several times a day.
- Taking an anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen. Adults aged 65 years and older should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine for more than 7 days without their healthcare provider's approval.
- Having an injection of a medicine like cortisone.

You will be given rehabilitation exercises to help speed your recovery and prevent the problem from returning.

How long will the effects last?

The length of recovery depends on many factors such as your age, health, and if you have had a previous injury. Recovery time also depends on the severity of the injury. A mild injury may recover within a few weeks, whereas a severe injury may take 6 weeks or longer to recover.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your activities will be determined by how soon your wrist recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible.

You need to stop doing 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. You may return to your normal activities when it is no longer painful to move your thumb or wrist. You may need to do activities wearing a supportive splint until you no longer have symptoms.

How can I prevent de Quervain's tenosynovitis?

Avoiding activities that overuse your thumb or wrist may prevent de Quervain's tenosynovitis.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

© 2009 RelayHealth and/or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.