

# De Quervain's Tenosynovitis

## What is it?

De Quervain's Tenosynovitis is a condition of the thumb and wrist commonly associated with pain in this area. There are two tendons that straighten your thumb into a 'thumbs up' by travelling together on the back of your thumb through a 'tunnel'. The pain is due to a break down of collagen in this area which can lead to thickening of the tendons, the 'tunnel' or both. This causes difficulty and pain to glide the tendons through the 'tunnel'. De Quervain's can usually be diagnosed by clinical assessment and/or ultrasound imaging.



The affected 'tunnel'

De Quervain's has no single cause. Women are affected more than men. De Quervain's commonly occurs during and after pregnancy and pre-menopause. Other common risk factors include knocking your wrist, rheumatoid arthritis, aging and variations in the anatomy of your wrist.

## Symptoms

- Pain, tenderness and/or swelling between your wrist and thumb on the back of your hand
- Difficulty and pain moving your thumb and/or wrist

## Treatment

It is recommended that non-surgical treatment for De Quervain's is initially trialled. The following treatments are a guide. Your occupational therapist or physiotherapist will recommend those which are appropriate for you.

## Non-surgical treatment may involve:

### Swelling Management

If you notice swelling, your therapist will show you some strategies to manage this. These strategies may include compression, massage, elevation or icing techniques.

## Activity Modification

Typically, tasks that aggravate symptoms include repetitive, and/or resistive hand activities as well as tight gripping and side to side wrist movements with your thumb out eg. Twisting off a lid, peeling potatoes, and lifting your baby. Avoiding activities that aggravate your pain is best.

Changing the way you perform activities may reduce your pain. If you have any specific tasks that are difficult and cause pain, talk to your therapist about specific strategies. Your therapist may also provide information on helpful websites and organisations with regard to activity modification strategies.

Some activity modification examples that you may find helpful are:

- Using your unaffected hand where possible
- Avoiding using your thumb to grasp objects. Try and use your whole hand
- Prioritise tasks that need to be done and try to delay those which are not important.
- Use built up grips on regularly used items eg. cutlery, pen, toothbrush
- Avoid carrying objects that require a firm grip eg. suitcase, bucket, full baby bath
- Use a jar opener when taking off lids
- Have washers replaced on commonly used taps to avoid tight grips. Install lever/flick taps if necessary
- Use a trolley to carry items eg. laundry
- Use electrical items where possible eg. food processor, juicer, dishwasher, can opener
- Choose bra's that have front clips
- Choose clothing for you (and your baby) that has minimal fastenings

## Massage

Gentle and pain free massage over the back of your thumb, wrist and forearm may help reduce your pain and swelling. You can do this whenever your symptoms are aggravated.

## Movements/Exercises

Gentle, pain free movements are important to prevent stiffness of your joints and encourage tendon healing. Your therapist will recommend an exercise program specific for your symptoms.

## Splinting

There are a variety of splints that may help to reduce your symptoms. Your therapist will recommend the most appropriate splint, if it is necessary.

## Other Non-surgical treatment

In addition to hand therapy, your symptoms may be helped by either anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) or corticosteroid injections. These treatments should be discussed with your Doctor.

## What if non-surgical treatment does not help?

If non-surgical treatment does not reduce your symptoms, your doctor may recommend orthopaedic review and/or surgical intervention.

**Please contact your therapist if you would like more information or if you have any queries or concerns.**

**Therapist:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone: 3646 7100**