

**Patient
Information**

De Quervain's disease of the hand

Introduction

This leaflet describes de Quervain's disease and the symptoms it may cause. It will help you to understand the treatment available to reduce your symptoms.

What is de Quervain's disease?

This condition results in the sheath covering the tendons on the thumb side of the wrist becoming thickened and painful. The sheath normally acts as a tunnel that holds the tendons in place. This allows them to slide up and down freely when the wrist or thumb moves (Figure 1). When the sheath thickens, the tunnel becomes narrower and it is more difficult for the tendons to slide through. This can result in the tendons becoming inflamed and often results in pain when using the hand.



Figure 1: Tendons at the thumb side of the wrist

What are the causes?

In many cases this can happen without a clear reason. Sometimes it is caused by gripping for long periods with the wrist bent forwards or to one side. It can also be caused by rapid, repeated movements of the thumb and/or wrist for long periods of time.

The start of De Quervain's disease sometimes follows after a blow to the outside of the wrist.

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Department

Therapy

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**Patient
Information**

De Quervain's disease is most common in people between the ages of 30 and 55 years, although it can happen at any age. Women are 3 times more likely to be affected than men, particularly those who have a young baby. It is not known whether this is due to hormonal changes as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, or due to lifting and carrying or feeding the baby.

What are the symptoms?

Pain is felt at the base of the thumb and side of the wrist. It is usually worse when moving the wrist sideways while gripping with the thumb. There may be swelling or a firm lump at the painful spot. Clicking, grating or snapping sounds are sometimes heard or felt with movements of the thumb and wrist.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis is usually made based on the symptoms and by simple tests involving movements of the wrist and thumb.

What is the treatment?

- Activities which cause pain should be adapted. You may need to change the position of your hand and wrist during work and leisure. You should take regular breaks during gripping activities
- Supporting the affected area using a splint, which includes the wrist and thumb, can be helpful. Your hand therapist can give you advice about the most suitable type of splint
- Over-the-counter pain relief and/or anti-inflammatory medication may help to control the symptoms. Ask your pharmacist or GP for advice
- Once the pain has started to settle, exercises to strengthen the muscles around the wrist and thumb should be gradually introduced. Your hand therapist will advise you
- A steroid injection into the tendon sheath may be helpful if other treatments have not been successful. Up to 80% of patients with de Quervain's disease respond to this treatment. Some patients may need more than 1 injection.

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Contact information

Therapy Department

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Tel: 0300 422 8527 or

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Further information

For further information about tendon injuries (including de Quervain's), please go to the following website:

NHS Choices

Website:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Tendonitis/Pages/Symptoms.aspx

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