



De Quervain's tenosynovitis

Overview

De Quervain's tenosynovitis (dih-kwer-VAINS ten-oh-sine-oh-VIE-tis) is a painful condition affecting the tendons on the thumb side of your wrist. If you have de Quervain's tenosynovitis, it will probably hurt when you turn your wrist, grasp anything or make a fist.

Although the exact cause of de Quervain's tenosynovitis isn't known, any activity that relies on repetitive hand or wrist movement — such as working in the garden, playing golf or racket sports, or lifting your baby — can make it worse.

Symptoms

Symptoms of de Quervain's tenosynovitis include:

- Pain near the base of your thumb
- Swelling near the base of your thumb
- Difficulty moving your thumb and wrist when you're doing something that involves grasping or pinching
- A "sticking" or "stop-and-go" sensation in your thumb when moving it

If the condition goes too long without treatment, the pain may spread further into your thumb, back into your forearm or both. Pinching, grasping and other movements of your thumb and wrist aggravate the pain.

When to see a doctor

Consult your doctor if you're still having problems with pain or function and you've already tried:

- Not using your affected thumb
- Applying cold to the affected area
- Using nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) and naproxen (Aleve)

Causes

Chronic overuse of your wrist is commonly associated with de Quervain's tenosynovitis.

Tendons are rope-like structures that attach muscle to bone. When you grip, grasp, clench, pinch or wring anything in your hand, two tendons in your wrist and lower thumb normally glide smoothly through the small tunnel that connects them to the base of the thumb. Repeating a particular motion day after day may irritate the sheath around the two tendons, causing thickening and swelling that restricts their movement.

Other causes of de Quervain's tenosynovitis include:

- Direct injury to your wrist or tendon; scar tissue can restrict movement of the tendons
- Inflammatory arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis

Risk factors

Risk factors for de Quervain's tenosynovitis include:

- **Age.** If you're between the ages of 30 and 50, you have a higher risk of developing de Quervain's tenosynovitis than do other age groups, including children.
- **Sex.** The condition is more common in women.
- **Being pregnant.** The condition may be associated with pregnancy.
- **Baby care.** Lifting your child repeatedly involves using your thumbs as leverage and may also be associated with the condition.
- **Jobs or hobbies that involve repetitive hand and wrist motions.** These may contribute to de Quervain's tenosynovitis.

Complications

Untreated de Quervain's tenosynovitis might make it hard to use your hand and wrist properly and limit your wrist's range of motion.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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