

Repetitive Use Injuries

We take medicine to improve blood pressure. We try to eat foods that will decrease our cholesterol. And we exercise to keep our heart healthy. But we take a certain part of the body for granted: our hands.

Our hands do everything for us – open jars, take out the garbage, sign documents – everything. We use our hands from the minute we wake up to the minute we go to sleep, yet we do not even consider the consequences of our actions.

Repetitive strain injury (RSI) refers to a category of injuries involving muscle, tendon and nerve damage caused by overuse and misuse. This may include performing repetitive tasks, working in or sustaining an awkward position, forceful exertions, and insufficient rest time.

Who Is at Risk?

RSIs are more common than you think and are beginning to affect people at a much earlier age. With social medias like Facebook and Twitter gaining popularity, younger generations are using their hands more and more by typing on a computer and texting. Although computers and cell phones have provided society with numerous benefits, extended use can cause problems like RSIs.

A person's profession is also a risk factor when it comes to RSIs. Besides anyone who works on a computer all day, those who work as assembly-line workers, stock clerks, warehouse workers, transcriptionists and garment workers are at risk. Also, people who work as gardeners, bank tellers, musicians and even athletes should be aware of RSIs.

Do I Have an RSI?

These injuries are more than just a sore wrist or aching fingers. Overuse and misuse of the hand can lead to serious injuries. You should be aware of the following injuries and take preventative measure to avoid them:

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: This compression of the median nerve through the carpal tunnel, located at the base of the hand, causes numbness and tingling of the fingers, weakness and pain.

DeQuervain's Tenosynovitis: This RSI is localized to the tendons of the thumb at the level of the wrist. It is most commonly caused by sideways movement of the wrist with the thumb stabilized in a gripping position.

Epicondylitis: Don't forget that the way you use your hands can affect other parts of the arm. This is an overuse syndrome resulting in

an inflammatory response of the tendon on the inside or the outside of the elbow. It's also known as golfer's elbow and tennis elbow.

Tendonitis/Tenosynovitis Tendonitis/Tenosynovitis: All involving an inflammation of the tendon or of the sheath surrounding the tendon, these injuries can occur in the hand, wrist, forearm or shoulder.

Trigger Finger/Thumb: The finger will lock or click when bent or straightened if the tendon or tendon sheath in the palm becomes to thick.

Can I Prevent an RSI?

To avoid all of these injuries, it is important to think about how much you use your hands and start taking preventative measures today. Simple daily exercises will decrease your chances of strain and allow more time for the things you enjoy doing. Here are six simple hand exercises that will move your joints, stretch your tendons and keep your hands healthy:

1. Place both hands in front of you and stretch your fingers out, keeping them up and open for a few seconds.
2. Keep both of your hands in front of you and curl your fingers and thumb into a ball. Hold this position a few seconds.
3. Put your arms in front of you and lift your right hand so that the palm of your hand points out and your fingers face up. Using your other hand, push the fingers towards your body until you feel a slight stretch. Repeat with the other hand.
4. Hold your arms out in front of you and point your right hand down. You should be staring at your wrist. Place your other hand on the knuckles of the hand pointing down and put a little pressure until you feel a slight stretch to the top of the wrist. Change hands and repeat.
5. Hold one hand with the palm up and use the other hand to gently massage. Be sure to work the inside, outside and in between the fingers. Repeat with the other hand.
6. Lace your fingers and with the palms facing away from you, gently stretch your arms out straight.

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