

De Quervain's Tensynovitis

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What is De Quervain's Tensynovitis?

De Quervain's tensynovitis is inflammation of the lining of the tendons which straighten the thumb at the level of the wrist. As the tendons pass through a tight canal, a vicious cycle of further inflammation and swelling is set up. This manifests as pain along the side of the wrist radiating toward the thumb and is worse when gripping or turning objects.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made on the basis of the symptoms of pain and localised tenderness. Sometimes there is swelling and a grating sensation on moving the thumb. The pain can be reproduced by bending the wrist, with the thumb held down. X-rays are sometimes indicated to exclude other disorders. An ultrasound scan can confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

The pain and swelling can sometimes be improved by splinting the wrist and thumb straight and injecting a tiny amount of steroid. If this does not help, surgery may be indicated. The procedure is usually undertaken on a day case basis under general anaesthesia. The tight tendon sheath is released and any entrapment of the superficial branch of the radial nerve can be dealt with at the same time. A plaster of Paris splint is usually applied.

After surgery

The stitches are left in for approximately 2 weeks. The hand must be kept dry during the first week. You can bathe by placing a plastic bag over the hand. A long-acting anaesthetic is used, which means that the numbness lasts for several hours and simple pain killers are all that are necessary afterwards. It is very important you keep your hand elevated as much as possible, at least during the first week. During the daytime you can wear a sling and at night the hand can be rested on a couple of pillows. This helps reduce the swelling and postoperative discomfort. It may take some time for the pain to settle and it may be necessary to wear a thermoplastic splint when performing heavy activities, until all the inflammation has settled.

Possible complications

- As after any surgery, infection can occur, but is rare.
- Complex regional pain syndrome, which presents as pain, swelling, stiffness and discolouration, is uncommon and usually treated by intensive hand therapy and appropriate pain control.