What Is De Quervain Tenosynovitis?

De Quervain tenosynovitis occurs when the tissue in the thumb side of the wrist is inflamed. **Tendons** (cordlike fibers that attach muscle to bone) and **synovium** (a slick membrane that allows the tendons to move easily) become swollen. These problems can lead to pain.

Causes

Making the same motions over and over, such as repeatedly unscrewing jar lids or grasping a tool, can irritate the tendons. So can an injury to the thumb side of the wrist.



Symptoms

The most common symptom is pain on the thumb side of the wrist. You may feel pain when you pinch or grasp things, turn or twist your wrist, or make a fist. The thumb may also "catch" when you bend it. The thumb side of the wrist may be tender to the touch, and you may feel a small "knot."



Pain when you make a fist and bend your wrist toward your little finger is one of the signs of an inflamed tendon.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Your doctor can usually tell by moving your thumb whether the tendons are inflamed. Treatment will depend on how severe the pain is. Your doctor will review your options with you. Be sure to ask any questions you have.

Evaluating Your Thumb

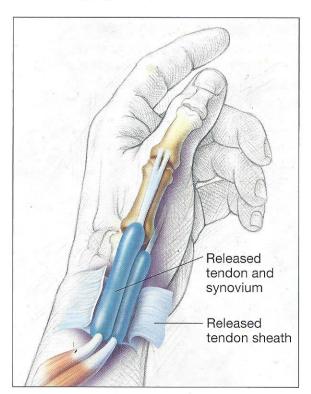
To diagnose de Quervain tenosynovitis, you may be asked to make a fist with your fingers over your thumb. Your doctor will then bend your wrist toward your little finger. A sharp pain in the wrist is a sign that the tendons are inflamed.

Nonsurgical Treatment

Just taking a break from the activities that caused your symptoms may be enough. Your doctor may also have you wear a splint for a few weeks to rest the thumb and wrist. To help reduce swelling, you may be given an oral anti-inflammatory medication to take, such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Your doctor may also suggest an injection of cortisone (a stronger anti-inflammatory) around the affected tendons.

Surgery

If other treatments don't relieve your pain, your doctor may recommend surgery. The sheath that surrounds the tendons is released so the tendons can move more easily. This helps reduce the inflammation and allows you to straighten your thumb without pain. Surgery often takes just a few minutes and is done with local anesthetic. You may go home the same day. You will probably have a splint or dressing on your wrist for a few days while the tissue heals. Your doctor will discuss the benefits and risks of surgery with you.



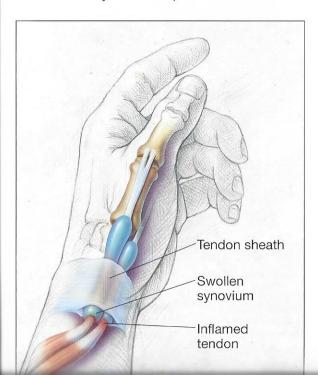
During surgery, the tendon sheath is released to allow more space for the tendons. This frees the tendons to move more easily and helps relieve the inflammation.

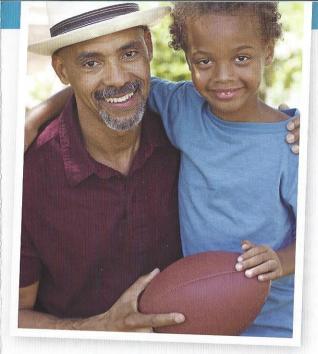
Inside Your Thumb

Tendons connect muscles in your wrist and forearm to the bones in your thumb. The tendons are surrounded by a protective tendon sheath. This sheath is lined with synovium. The synovium produces a fluid that allows the tendons to slide easily when you straighten your thumb. If the tendons are irritated or injured, they become inflamed.

When the Tendons Are Inflamed

When the tendons are inflamed, they cause the lining of the tendon sheath to swell and thicken. Or, the tendon sheath itself may thicken. Then the sheath pinches the tendons. They can no longer slide easily inside the sheath, and straightening the thumb and wrist may become painful.





Using Your Thumb Again

The goal of treatment is to relieve your pain and allow you to use your thumb again. Once the tendons have healed, your doctor may prescribe exercises, or refer you to a hand therapist, to help you regain strength and movement in your thumb. By working with your doctor and following your treatment plan, you should be able to get back to your normal activities.

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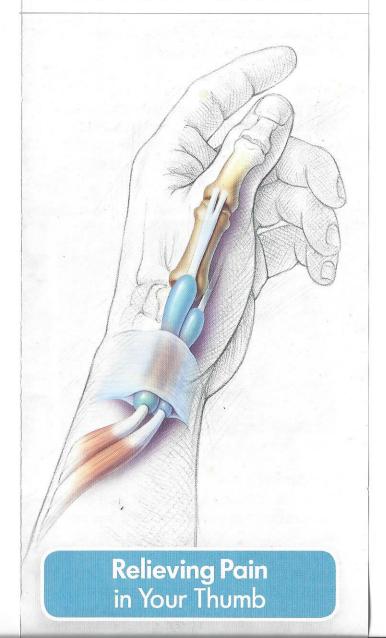
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DE QUERVAIN TENOSYNOVITIS



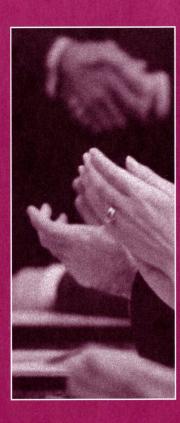
Treatment. The goal is to relieve the pain caused by the irritation and swelling. In some cases, your doctor may recommend resting the thumb and wrist by wearing a splint. Anti-inflammatory medication taken by mouth or injected into that tendon compartment may help reduce the swelling and relieve the pain. In some cases, simply not doing the activities that cause pain and swelling may allow the symptoms to go away on their own.

When symptoms are severe or do not improve, surgery may be recommended. The surgery opens the compartment (covering) to make more room for the irritated tendons (Figure 3). Normal use of the hand can usually be resumed once comfort and strength have returned. Your hand surgeon can advise you on the best treatment for your situation.



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of ASSH is to advance the science and practice of hand surgery through education, research and advocacy on behalf of patients and practitioners.



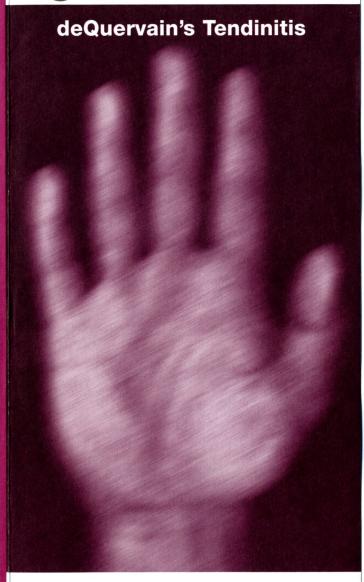


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Figure 1 Swelling about the tendons to the base of the thumb results in painful motion.

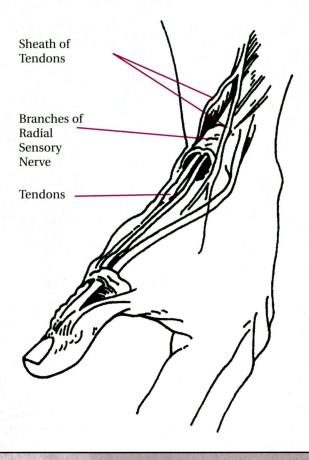


Figure 2 Finkelstein maneuver used to diagnose deQuervain's tendinitis.

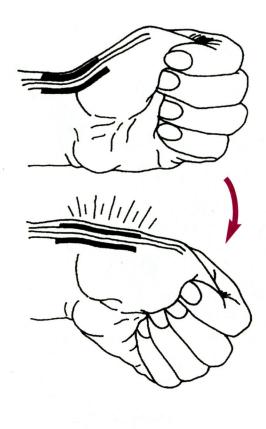
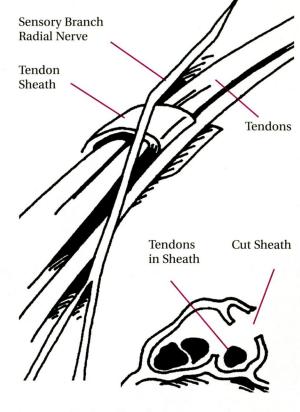


Figure 3 Surgery opens the sheath over the inflamed tendons.



Tendon Sheath Cross-section

That is it? deQuervain's tendinitis is a condition brought on by irritation or swelling of the tendons found along the thumb side of the wrist (Figure 1). The irritation causes the compartment (lining) around the tendon to swell, changing the shape of the compartment; this makes it difficult for the tendons to move as they should. The swelling can cause pain and tenderness along the thumb side of the wrist, usually noticed when forming a fist, grasping or gripping things, or turning the wrist.

Signs and symptoms. Pain over the thumb side of the wrist is the main symptom. The pain may appear either gradually or suddenly. It is felt in the wrist and can travel up the forearm. The pain is usually worse with use of the hand and thumb, especially when forcefully grasping things or twisting the wrist. Swelling over the thumb side of the wrist is noticed and may be accompanied by a fluid-filled cyst in this region. There may be an occasional "catching" or "snapping" when moving the thumb. Because of the pain and swelling, it may be difficult to move the thumb and wrist, such

as in pinching. Irritation of the nerve lying on top of the tendon sheath may cause numbness on the back of the thumb and index finger.

Diagnosis. A Finkelstein test is generally performed. In this test, the patient makes a fist with the fingers over the thumb. The wrist is then bent in the direction of the little finger (*Figure 2*). This test can be quite painful for the person with deQuervain's tendinitis. Tenderness directly over the tendons on the thumb side of the wrist is the most common finding, however.