

Orthopaedic Connection

Wrist Arthritis

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Wrist pain in older adults is usually caused by the development of arthritis. Wrist arthritis commonly develops as a result of trauma to the wrist area that may have occurred long ago. Perhaps you had even forgotten about it.

Complicated Joint

To set the stage you need to have a little course in “the wrist joint”. Ready?

The wrist consists of eight little bones which connect to each other by many small joints. One row of wrist bones connect to the five metacarpal bones in the hand and the upper row of wrist bones articulates with the two forearm bones (radius and ulna).

In brief, the wrist is an engineering marvel that is truly amazing. Whoever thought this up really knew what they were doing!!!! The wrist gives your hand a great range of motion and strength.

Durable

Arthritis due mainly to wear and tear doesn't usually happen in the wrist. The main cause of arthritis in the wrist is past trauma such as a wrist bone fracture or torn ligament. For all we use our wrists it is amazing that wear and tear arthritis doesn't happen often.

Causes of Wrist Pain

- Trauma to bones and ligaments
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Gout
- Lupus (autoimmune disease)
- Lyme disease

Special mention of rheumatoid arthritis is in order. It is the second most common form of arthritis. The joint lining (synovium) is attacked by our own immune system resulting in joint inflammation. This leads to destruction of cartilage and bone. Wrists become worn, painful, swollen and stiff.

Examination

Many regular readers know what I am about to say. Examination is extremely important in trying to figure this out. The doctor has to touch the patient to examine them, not just look at them. Sigh. Sometimes I think physical exam is a dying art. Too bad.

There are lots of other causes of wrist pain. I have to figure it out for you.

X-rays and Other Tests

A plain x-ray study is normally sufficient. Occasionally I might need an MRI, CT or bone scan, but not too often. Some basic lab tests in some cases are needed to help make the diagnosis.

RA Diagnosed

If I determine that you have rheumatoid arthritis it often requires specialized care of an internist who specialized in arthritis, i.e. a rheumatologist. They have available to them several disease modifying and immune suppressing drugs which I almost never prescribe.

We have an agreement – they don't do surgery and I try not to prescribe immune suppressing drugs! Works out better that way.

Treatment

In non rheumatoid wrist arthritis there are many things that can be done for our patients to decrease pain and increase function.

Since I am out of my allotted space I will have to continue the wrist arthritis topic next week.

See you then.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

What if there was a whole world of musculoskeletal information at one place? There is!

www.orthopodsurgeon.com opens up for you the office website, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Archive of all previous GCH articles I have written for you, your family and friends.

Please check it out. Do yourself a favor.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush