

Wrist Pain, Tendinitis and Sprains

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If your pain in the hand and wrist has gotten so bad you have had to stop some of your favorite activities --- you have come to the right place!

I feel for you, because I have been there. When you have practiced Orthopaedic Surgery for a long time, the surgeon (me) has experienced most of the things I write about. In other words I can be empathetic.

It could be that the hand and wrist pain you are experiencing is coming from connective tissues we call ligaments and tendons, which hold the hand and wrist together and allow for movement.

Injuries are common especially if you participate in certain activities that involve snapping wrist motions or heavy repetitive wrist or hand use.

In many cases pain can be relieved by self-care measures. When that's not enough, additional measures are available and that is where I come in.

Tendons

These are the thick fibrous structures (patients call them cords) that attach muscles to bone. In the wrist, they are covered by a slippery membrane called tenosynovium, which allows the tendons to move smoothly. Inflammation can occur in the tendons and tenosynovium.

Primary symptoms of either are pain, tenderness and sometimes swelling. Pain is aggravated by moving the affected area.

There is one very common form of tendinitis in the wrist that I need to tell you about. It occurs on the thumb side of the wrist and runs along the outside base of the thumb.

This part of the hand is used in many common activities such as opening doors and doing complicated orthopaedic surgery ---. Just kidding! I wanted to see if you were paying attention! It can cause pain and swelling and without rest or treatment the pain can spread down the thumb and up into the forearm.

It is different from carpal tunnel, because it does not cause any numbness or tingling in the hand.

Conservative Treatment includes

- Using a heating pad for fifteen minutes followed by an ice pack for fifteen minutes. Therapists do this all the time and it really helps.
- Get yourself some Advil or similar anti-inflammatory medication to help reduce pain and swelling.
- If you are aware of which movements are causing the pain, limit them temporarily.
- Get a splint or brace to restrict hand movement temporarily.

When conservative treatment doesn't work

- You may need Physical/Occupational Therapy, which has available several modalities like electrical stimulation, ultrasound/cortisone cream.
- Steroid injections are sometimes administered.
- Prescription anti-inflammatory medication is sometimes helpful.
- Surgery is usually curative in stubborn cases to cut a sheath of tissue that encloses the tendons and synovial lining.

Surgery can release pressure and speed healing by giving inflamed and restricted tissues more space.

I think the ligament aspect of this discussion will need to wait till next week. Ligament problems are important and somewhat more complicated and merit their own thorough coverage. Please come back next week for part two.

All Orthopaedic Surgery problems can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at the Lakeview Community Wellness Center in Lakeview or at the office in Alma at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan.

Please call 989-463-6092 for information or to schedule an appointment.

Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center Clinic dates are May 1 and May 15, 2009.

Please don't forget there is a wealth of accurate information about all the Orthopaedic conditions I treat on the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. Please log on and check it out.

We are happy to answer questions from readers. You can e-mail me at orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com or write to me at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan 48801.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free functional lives.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush