

Tendinitis

RSI Conditions

The term Repetitive Strain Injury is an umbrella term used to describe a number of specific musculoskeletal conditions, including tendinitis, as well as 'diffuse RSI', which is more difficult to define but which recent research attributes to nerve damage. These conditions are often occupational in origin. Lack of adequate diagnosis or access to appropriate treatment can exacerbate the condition and sometimes leads to job loss and economic hardship.

What is Tendinitis?

This condition refers to the tender swelling of tendons, the rope or cord like structures which connect muscles to bones in order to work the joints of the body. When any group of tendons are overused microscopic tears can result, leading to inflammation. Even the slightest contraction in the muscle can then lead to further irritation. In 'RSI', Tendinitis more commonly affects the hand, wrist, elbows and shoulders, although it may occur at any joint in the body. Other conditions may be linked to inflammation of the tendons, such as *Tenosynovitis* and *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome* or it may appear under specific names related to the area affected, for example *Epicondylitis (tennis elbow)*. Pain in the muscles is not Tendinitis and, by itself, it will not give neurological symptoms such as tingling and numbness.

The Symptoms

Tendinitis results in pain and local tenderness. The thickening and scarring may prevent the affected fingers or limbs from going through their normal range of movements. The increase in pain and disability is usually gradual, unless the injury is the result of sudden strain (tearing) or a direct blow.

The Causes

The most common recognisable factor is overloading the tendon through repetitive physical activity. Certain sports may cause discomfort and at work it can occur from overuse of the keyboard, computer mouse or through routine assembly line work.

The Doctor's Examination

In the UK, GPs receive little training in the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. With a chronic case, your doctor will ideally refer you to a specialist who has taken an interest in RSI-type conditions, usually a rheumatologist or neurologist.

Tenderness and swelling over and around the inflamed tendon are the obvious signs that a doctor will look for.

Treatment

Treatment by rest is only effective if the original cause is also addressed. Tendon injuries are not conditions that can be worked through. Tablets may ease the pain or quieten the inflammation, but the problem will not go away unless some changes are made at work. Areas to consider include pacing, rest breaks, reducing repetition and force, posture and the use of ergonomically designed tools and equipment to reduce the risk of further injury.

Tendons need only a small amount of nourishment and therefore have only a minimal blood supply. This means that when a tendon is damaged it heals quite slowly. Some physiotherapists treat Tendinitis with connective tissue manipulation and manual lymph drainage reduce tension in the affected area, improve the circulation and settle the inflammation. A programme of personal exercises, designed to stretch and strengthen the site of the injury, will assist with recovery. Chiropractors and osteopaths have some expertise in this area as well.

Nutritionists may recommend taking calcium and magnesium supplements, as they are vital for tissue and muscle repair. However it is wise to check that any complementary therapist is a registered practitioner, in the same way you would expect your doctor to be.

For more detailed advice, please refer to the RSI Awareness information sheet 'RSI – Its Nature And Treatment'.