

### Vibration White Finger

#### RSI Conditions

The term Repetitive Strain Injury is an umbrella term used to describe a number of specific musculoskeletal conditions, including Vibration White Finger, 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 Vibration White Finger?

Vibration White Finger is a condition in which the blood supply is interrupted, the result of a constriction of the blood vessels in the hand, leading to the symptoms in the fingers and thumb described below. In the late 1990s many thousands of miners and gas workers received compensation from British Coal and British Gas for injuries sustained using pneumatic drills and hammers.

#### The Symptoms

With Vibration White Finger, the fingers become white and blue or simply white, as the blood vessels in the hand constrict, until circulation ceases. The hands become clumsy in cold weather. Vibration White Finger is usually painful and may be accompanied by a tingling feeling or may eventually result in loss of sensation. There are many other possible causes of these symptoms, which come under the phenomena *Raynaud's Disease*.



## **The Causes**

The use of vibrating tools dates from the nineteenth century. Reports of associated symptoms first appeared in the early 1990s and the condition is a recognised industrial injury (A11) for a range of occupations using hand-held percussive or vibrating tools. Cold working conditions seem to increase the risk of damage.

## **The Doctor's Examination**

In the UK, GPs receive little training in the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. Ideally your doctor will refer you to a specialist who has taken an interest in RSI-type conditions, usually a rheumatologist or neurologist. In order to establish the diagnosis there has to be a history of exposure to vibration with the exclusion of other possible causes.

## **Treatment**

Vibration White Finger, as distinct from other forms of *Raynaud's* Disease, is progressive and irreversible. It is essential to avoid further exposure to work involving repetitive movements of the fingers or holding vibrating machinery. Warmth may reduce the symptoms.

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