De Quervain’s Tenosynovitis (DQ) is an inflammatory condition of the wrist and thumb, named after a Swiss surgeon in 1895. It involves the tunnel (tendon sheath) through which two of the tendons run and is usually caused by compression and over-use.

When the demands on the tendons exceed their ability to glide smoothly and freely, friction results. The friction causes inflammation to occur between the sheath, tendons and the bone beneath them. This in turn causes swelling and soreness which causes more pressure on the tendons in the sheath. If the over-use continues the inflammation becomes chronic, resulting in continued pain, swelling and loss of function.
De Quervain’s Tenosynovitis (DQ)

The Symptoms

Pain over the bony part of the wrist under the thumb which can spread up and down from this point. Swelling in the same place and the back of the thumb. Some redness may be seen when the condition is acute and sometimes a crunching sensation (called crepitus) is felt on movement. Sideways movements of the wrist, twisting the wrist, gripping and any thumb movements can bring on the pain. It is commonly caused by repetitive twisting and sideways movement of the wrist away from the thumb.

Treatment

The cause of DQ is usually over-use, so treatment is aimed at reducing the inflammation and compression by resting the tendons. In the acute stage a removable splint is fitted to the thumb and wrist. It is worn at all times apart from at bedtime and for exercises. Application of ice in a damp tea towel, for a maximum of 10 minutes, may also help with the pain and swelling. Application can be repeated every two hours if needed.

Gentle mobility exercises are useful to regain the proper flexibility and you may find that anti-inflammatory tablets or gel, rubbed onto the affected area, help to settle the symptoms. See overleaf.
These exercises should be carried out **SLOWLY**. Each exercise should be repeated five times, three to four times per day.

It is important to look at your lifestyle and any repetitive activities of daily living which could be reduced or changed.

All photographs courtesy of the Hand Therapy Department, GWH NHS Foundation Trust, 9/6/2021.

**Please retain this leaflet for future reference.**
De Quervain’s Tenosynovitis (DQ)

For further advice or information you can telephone NHS 111

https://111.nhs.uk/

Smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net.