



repetitive stress injuries

How to prevent and treat them

prevention

- If your job requires repetitive motions for long periods of time, take frequent breaks and stretch often.
- Don't remain in any one position for an extended period of time.
- If you sit at a computer all day, consult an ergonomics expert or occupational therapist in order to ensure that your workstation and chair properly support you. Your position should also support your wrists when typing.
- Always stretch before and after any kind of activity or exercise.
- If you notice a dull pain, tingling or numbness, get it checked by a physician immediately.
- By keeping physically fit, you will help to avoid strain from any type of motion or activity.
- Throughout the day do a regular check of your posture. Adjust if you find yourself slouching.

"Repetitive motion injuries do not occur solely in the workplace. We are all at risk whether on the job or at play."

Robert Shmerling, M.D.
associate professor of medicine,
Harvard Medical School

what it is

A soft-tissue injury in which muscles, tendons or nerves become irritated or inflamed. Bursitis, carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis are all examples of repetitive stress (or strain) injuries (RSI).

symptoms

Most common in the wrists, hands or arms, the pain varies depending on the type of RSI. Whatever the type, severe RSI can make it difficult to pick up objects or extend arms and legs.

Symptoms of RSI do not always appear right away. Sometimes they occur after the prolonged activity has been stopped. In other cases, the pain may appear only when performing the motion. A tennis player may experience elbow pain long after playing and not realize it's related to swinging the racket. But the next time she plays, there's no question about what causes the pain. The worse the pain, the more severe the injury and the longer the recovery time.

causes

- Performing a repetitive task that requires small, rapid movements
- Maintaining an awkward or stationary position for a long period of time
- Doing one strong, forceful movement
- Not taking enough rest or recovery breaks during demanding tasks

those at risk

Everyone is at risk for developing RSI, but computer operators, musicians, assembly-line workers, meat packers, construction workers, truck drivers, ice cream scoopers, knitters, runners, tennis players, rock climbers, golfers and downhill skiers are especially prone. If early symptoms are ignored, a more chronic condition may develop.

treatment

- Rest and avoiding the activity or position that is causing the problem
- A wrist or arm wrap to immobilize the affected area
- A change in the position of your chair, desk, computer or golf swing
- Aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen or ice packs to dull the pain
- Stretching exercises or physical therapy
- Cortisone injections

WANT TO KNOW MORE? The American Academy of Family Physicians e-help: familydoctor.org ● The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 800-321-OSHA (6742) e-help: www.osha.gov