

CONDITIONS

DE QUERVAIN'S SYNDROME

De Quervain's synovitis is a painful, relatively common condition caused by the extensor tendons of the thumb catching within a tunnel on the thumb side of the wrist (the first dorsal extensor compartment). The condition can often be seen in mothers of small babies (perhaps due to nursing the baby with the hand wrapped around the child's head and the wrist held in flexion, it is anecdotally more common in biotechnology workers who use pipettes, it may be more common in patients with a particular anatomical idiosyncrasy: a septum with the first dorsal extensor compartment).

SYMPTOMS

Patients complain of pain on the thumb side of the wrist aggravated by use of the hand and elevation of the thumb. There may be localised swelling, and tenderness.

MAKING THE DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis can usually be confirmed reliably during a normal consultation. Patients are asked to give a history of the symptoms and are examined. Traction and ulnar deviation of the thumb during the examining surgeon causes pain (Finkelstein's test).

TREATMENT

Non-surgical treatments: activity modification, Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory medication may help. A steroid injection (triamcinalone) into the first dorsal extensor compartment will be effective in 70% of cases. A splint can be used to immobilize and rest the thumb and wrist.

Surgical treatment: if non-surgical treatment fails, surgery will usually help. The operation can be performed through a short transverse incision (less than 2cm) under local anaesthetic as a day case procedure. Patients have a light dressing for 11 days, and can return to driving when the hand is comfortable and strong. Patients may need to continue to wear a splint for between 2 and 4 weeks.