



What is it?

RSI includes a range of painful conditions of the muscles, tendons and other soft tissues. It is mainly caused by repetitive use of part of the body. It is usually related to a job or occupation, but leisure activities can also be a cause. Unlike a 'normal' strain following a sudden injury, symptoms of RSI can persist well beyond the time it would take symptoms of a 'normal' strain to ease.

What causes it?

The main cause is frequent and repetitive, movements and/or postures of a part of the body. For example, typing or using a computer mouse a lot. Other factors may contribute such as using excessive force whilst doing the movement, or not scheduling short breaks from the task. The precise reason why RSI develops is not clear. In many cases there is no swelling, inflammation or other obvious problems which develop in the muscles or tendons. It is not clear why some people develop RSI and others who do the same tasks do not.

Symptoms

In most cases the symptoms develop in an arm, wrist or hand as these parts of the body most commonly doing repetitive tasks. In recent years it is computer operators, typists, musicians and people doing repetitive tasks in factories who most commonly develop RSI. People who do a lot of DIY around the house may develop RSI, or people who do certain sports which involve repetitive movements.

Symptoms develop gradually and can include: pain, tightness, dull ache, throbbing, numbness, or tingling in the affected area. At first the symptoms may only occur whilst you do the repetitive task and ease with rest. In time the symptoms can be present all the time, but tend to be made worse by doing the repetitive task.

What should you do?

It is thought that the earlier the problem is recognised and dealt with, the better the outcome. A doctor may advise various things which may include the following;

- If possible, stop or reduce the repetitive tasks or activities which are causing the symptoms. Discuss the problem with your employer as a change of task or work environment may be possible. Sometimes you will manage with a temporary stop in your duties with a gradual resumption.
- Medication as recommended by your pharmacist or GP.
- A referral to a physiotherapist who can give advice of posture and how to strengthen the muscles involved. Regular exercise is important in managing symptoms.
- Some people find treatments such as yoga, relaxation techniques, regular general exercise (such as swimming) to be useful in easing the symptoms.

Can you prevent it?

Symptoms often ease with the above measures. It is then wise to review your work or other activities to prevent further bouts of RSI. For example:

- If you work with a computer, is your seat, keyboard, mouse, etc, positioned in the correct way with the least strain likely on your hands and fingers.
- Do you sit with a good posture if you have a desk job?
- If you do a repetitive task at work, do you take regular, short, postural breaks from your repetitive activities and sustained postures?
- Is there anything you and your employer could do to improve your working environment?

In many cases the symptoms ease and cause little discomfort or disruption to work and leisure activities if measures are taken to stop or reduce the repetitive task as soon as the symptoms start to develop. However, despite rest and treatment some people develop symptoms that persist long-term. The impact of this can range from being slightly disruptive to quite debilitating.

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