

Wrist and Hand Pain

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



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www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

What causes hand pain?

Wrist and hand pain is very common and can affect people at any age. Although this can be very painful, it is usually **not** caused by serious damage.

Some possible causes of wrist and hand pain are:

- an injury or fall that leads to a sprain or a strain
- repetitive or overuse injuries of the muscles or tendons of the wrist or hand
- age-related changes, also known as osteoarthritis.
- sudden changes in activity levels – such as doing much more than usual or being much less active
- poor sleep, stress, feeling low or very tired can also make pain worse
- specific conditions such as: carpal tunnel syndrome, De Quervain's tenosynovitis or rheumatoid arthritis

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can be different for everyone. You may experience:

- pain in the wrist, hand, fingers or thumbs
- reduced movement or stiffness, such as difficulty bending or straightening the fingers

- a weaker grip
- swelling or tenderness of the fingers, hand or wrist.
- pain when lifting or gripping
- tingling or numbness in the hand

Self-help

Most new wrist, hand or finger pain gets better **within 6–8 weeks**. Following some of these useful tips can help with your recovery:

- change activity levels – don't stop completely but changing or reducing your activity levels can help at first
- keep the wrist and hand moving – gentle movement helps prevent stiffness and won't cause harm
- use simple pain relief – ask a pharmacist or GP for advice before taking
- look after your sleep and stress – both can affect how much pain you feel
- stay at work or return as soon as you can – your employer or GP can help with adjustments
- try gentle exercises – moving regularly and doing simple exercises can help
- use heat or ice – a heat pack, hot water bottle or ice pack can ease pain (don't put this onto bare skin)

- warm water soaks – soaking your hands in warm water can help reduce pain and stiffness (make sure the water isn't too hot)

Should I refer myself to physiotherapy?

Physiotherapy may help if:

- your wrist or hand pain is not improving after a few weeks despite the above advice
- pain is affecting your work or daily activities
- you are struggling with gripping or lifting
- you experience recurrent episodes of wrist or hand pain

When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Wrist and hand pain is **rarely serious**, however go to **Accident & Emergency or an Urgent Care Centre now** if you have:

- pain or difficulty moving the wrist, hand or fingers/thumb following a fall or injury
- a visible deformity of the wrist, hand or fingers/thumb
- significant swelling, redness or heat around the joint with a fever

- a sudden loss of power or sensation affecting the hand
- a loss of or reduced sensation in both hands, associated with increasing clumsiness or difficulty performing finer tasks or activities (e.g. doing up buttons / handling money)

Contact your **GP or call 111 urgently** if you have:

- new, unexplained wrist or hand pain, with a history of cancer, HIV, TB or inflammatory arthritis
- hand or wrist pain along with feeling unwell, a loss of appetite, fever, unexplained weight loss or night sweats
- pain affecting both of your hands with a lot of stiffness in the morning

Remember

Most wrist and hand pain will improve with **time, gentle movement** and a **gradual return to normal activities**.

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/



Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources [www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

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