

Thumb and wrist pain after having a baby

New mothers can get painful thumbs and wrists.

This condition is known as de Quervain's tenosynovitis, mother's wrist or baby wrist.

It is caused by a combination of:

- hormonal changes in pregnancy
- increased pressure on wrist tendons when lifting and holding your baby

Some women also get thumb and wrist pain during pregnancy.

Symptoms

You might have baby wrist if you feel:

- pain when you move your thumb or wrist - this can travel up the arm
- pain when you tuck your thumb in and make a fist
- swelling and tenderness on the thumb side of your wrist
- a catching or snapping feeling when you move your thumb

Treatment

You can often ease the pain yourself with:

- ice massage
- stretching techniques
- painkillers such as paracetamol
- a rigid wrist splint

If the pain is not easing, see your physiotherapist.

Things you can do to avoid making the pain worse

Managing your pain is the best way to treat thumb and wrist pain. It will help you recover quicker.

You can try the following things to ensure your pain does not get worse:

- change how you move your hand and wrist until symptoms begin to ease
- scoop your baby up with your sore hand under their bottom - this can be more comfortable than lifting them under the arms
- use pillows or cushions to support your arms while breastfeeding, so there's less pressure on your hands
- try a nursing pillow to lift your baby closer
- keep your wrist rigid - this avoids pain irritation
- avoid wrist movements like opening the lid on a jar that is quite tight
- avoid using your thumb to grip objects

Massage

Massage the area of muscle at the base of your thumb called the 'thenar eminence'. Massaging this muscle can help you naturally hold your thumb further away from your palm.

Stretching exercises

Put your hand on a table, palm facing down. Use your other hand to gently move your thumb upwards and away from the table for 10 to 15 seconds. Bring your thumb down slowly. Repeat 5 times every 2 hours.

Rest the side of your hand on a table, with the little finger at the bottom. Use your other hand to move your thumb away from your fingers. Bring your thumb back down slowly. Repeat 5 to 10 times every 2 hours.

More support

Seek physiotherapy advice if you are having difficulty managing this problem.

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