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Where can I get more information?
Call 111 when you need medical help fast, but it’s not an emergency.

Or visit:

www.nhs.uk/symptomcheckers

UCLH cannot accept responsibility for information provided by external organisations.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this document, please contact us on 020 3447 0083. We will try our best to meet your needs.
Introduction
Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is used as an umbrella term to refer to various kinds of injuries to muscles, tendons or nerves caused by repetitive movement of a part of the body.

The most common conditions include:

- **Bursitis** – inflammation of the fluid-filled sac near a joint at the knee, elbow or shoulder.
- **Carpal tunnel syndrome** – pressure on the median nerve passing through the wrist.
- **Dupuytren's contracture** – a thickening of the deep tissue that passes from the palm of the hand into the fingers.
- **Epicondylitis** – inflammation of an area where bone and tendon join, for example tennis elbow.
- **Ganglion** – a cyst in a tendon sheath, usually occurring on the wrist.
- **Rotator cuff syndrome** – inflammation of muscles and tendons in the shoulder.
- **Tendonitis** – inflammation of a tendon.
- **Tenosynovitis** – inflammation of the inner lining of the tendon sheath.
- **Trigger finger** – inflammation of the tendon sheaths of fingers or thumb accompanied by swelling of the tendon.
- **Diffuse RSI** – nerve damage.

RSI is caused or aggravated by frequently repeated movements. As many more people are increasingly using computers, the chances of developing RSI increase.

It is also linked to many types of repetitive manual work, especially the use of vibrating equipment.

If there are any symptoms, including painful, tingling or swollen hands, elbows, wrists or shoulders it is important to get treatment quickly. The sooner treatment is started, the better the chances of recovery.

Symptoms
Symptoms vary but include:

- pain or tenderness in the muscles or joints
- tingling (pins and needles) or numbness in the hand or arm
- loss of strength or sensation in the hand.

Initially, these symptoms may occur only when working, maybe towards the end of the day but improve when at rest. This stage may last for weeks.

Untreated, these symptoms persist, causing pain or aching much of the time. There may be tenderness and swelling in the affected area. This may last several months.

Finally, pain may be experienced all the time; sleep may be disturbed. At this stage the condition may be irreversible.

Causes

- Overuse of the muscles of the hands, wrists, arms, or shoulders on a repeated, often daily basis.
- Cold temperatures, vibrating equipment or forceful movements can exacerbate the condition.
- Awkward posture, poorly organised workstations and badly designed equipment, lack of rests or task variety can all add to the damage.
- Stress is often a factor.

Treatment

Early reporting of symptoms is essential to avoid RSI becoming disabling.

Initially, treatment aims to help with pain and to enable strength and mobility to return. This includes rest from work, painkillers, anti-inflammatory medicines, heat and cold packs, exercises and elastic supports or splints.

Depending on the diagnosis, further treatment options will vary and may include surgery, steroid injections, physiotherapy, electrical stimulation, osteopathy, chiropractic or deep tissue massage.

Alexander technique, Pilates, yoga or tai chi may also help.