

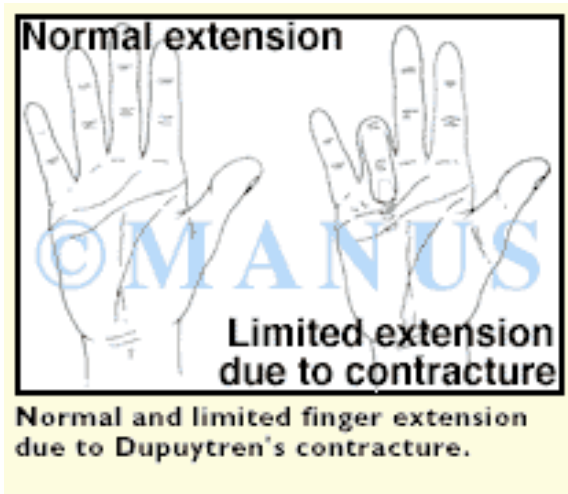
Dupuytren's Contracture

RSI Conditions

The term Repetitive Strain Injury is an umbrella term used to describe a number of specific musculoskeletal conditions, including Dupuytren's Contracture, as well as 'diffuse RSI', which is more difficult to define but which recent research attributes to nerve damage. These conditions are often occupational in origin. Lack of adequate diagnosis or access to appropriate treatment can exacerbate the condition and sometimes leads to job loss and economic hardship.

What is Dupuytren's Contracture?

Dupuytren's Contracture is a hand disorder in which the fingers bend towards the palm and cannot be straightened. The little and ring fingers are most commonly affected but all the fingers can become involved. In patients with this condition, scar tissue accumulates under the skin on the palm of the hand. The tissue (fascia) thickens and shortens so that tendons connected to the fingers cannot move freely.



The Symptoms

Dupuytren's Contracture progresses slowly and is usually painless. It may initially present as only a minor lump or nodule in the palm of the hand near the base of the fingers. As Dupuytren's Contracture develops, dimpling and puckering of the skin over the area may be seen and the thickened tissue will give rise to firm cord-like bands extending into the ring or little fingers. The affected fingers start to bend more and more and eventually cannot be straightened.

The Causes

The exact cause of Dupuytren's Contracture is usually difficult to identify. It may be seen with other work-related conditions such as bursitis or tendinitis, but evidence for or against it being an occupational disease is sparse. There is a slight tendency for it to run in families and it is known that it occurs more frequently in patients with diabetes, epilepsy and alcoholism. It is also more common in men than in women.

The Doctor's Examination

In the UK, GPs receive little training in the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist who has taken an interest in RSI-type conditions, usually a rheumatologist or neurologist. Dupuytren's Contracture is usually diagnosed during the physical examination of the affected hand.

Treatment

The treatment of Dupuytren's Contracture depends on the severity and the underlying condition of the affected individual. Some of the methods which have been investigated are physical therapy, vitamin E, ultrasound, steroid injections and the use of splints. For an accurately diagnosed case of Dupuytren's Contracture however, it is generally accepted that the only successful treatment is surgery.

Each case has to be considered individually and there is no automatic link between Dupuytren's Contracture and work. If occupational factors are part of the problem then changes to consider include pacing, rest breaks, reducing repetition and force, posture, and the use of ergonomically designed tools and equipment to make work tasks easier.