Hand and Wrist Pain

Hand and wrist pain affects millions of people each year. However, many are quick to associate their pain and discomfort to carpal tunnel syndrome. Hand and wrist pain is quite prominent in the medical transcription services field. The origin, causes and symptoms of associated wrist pain and discomfort can be attributed to many factors. For instance, a pinched ulnar nerve in your elbow, or repeated poor posture in your neck and spine can also trigger symptoms associated with hand and wrist pain. The radial, median and ulnar nerves affect different parts of the hand and different fingers. Repetitive motion, force and posture can have an impact on these nerves. A combination of lifestyle and genetic factors are likely to blame, but the risk factors are so diverse that nearly everybody has one or more of them at some point in their lives.

What are common symptoms of hand and wrist pain?

- Persistent pain, numbness or tingling in the hand
- Pain or tingling that runs from the hand up the arm
- Tingling or numbness in the fingers
- Fingers that “feel” swollen even though they aren’t
- Weakness in the hand and/or fingers
- Decreased grip strength
- Difficulty grasping small objects

The symptoms are your warning signs that something is wrong. Educate yourself on the condition, recognizing the symptoms and seeking medical treatment. It’s critical that you don’t delay in getting a doctor’s appointment. Early medical diagnosis and proper treatment can prevent permanent damage to the affected nerve.

What are some prevention measures for hand and wrist pain?

Handwriting tips:

- Hold your pen or pencil lightly and keep your fingers relaxed.
- Use a larger diameter pen/pencil, add a grip, or use a pen/pencil whose barrel has some texture in order to help reduce the force used to write.
- Switch from the standard ballpoint pen to a fancier gel pen or roller ball pen so that the tip glides over the paper meaning you can reduce the force used to write.
- Practice cursive writing! Large, cursive writing causes less strain than printing.
- Keep your elbow at 90 degrees or more because wrist and hand strain increases the more you bend your elbow.
- Keep your wrists straight and in line with your forearm.

Computing tips:

- Avoid resting your wrists on the laptop while typing especially if it means your hands are bent upwards or backwards at the wrist. Try keeping your wrists straight and in line with your forearms.
- Keep arms close to the body, elbows at 90 degrees.
- Use an external mouse or keyboard.
• Tap computer keys. Avoid pounding the keys to prevent strain of the tendons of the fingers, hands and forearm as well as cause pain in the joints.

• Adjust all components of the workstation such as chair, armrests, computer monitor and keyboard.

**Technology tips:**

• Consider the use of mobile device apps with handwriting recognition and predictive text options.

• Use ergonomically designed cases for mobile devices that require less force to hold and position the mobile device in a more comfortable position for writing.

• Ergonomically-designed pens, pencils and grips can alleviate writing discomfort by properly positioning the hand and fingers to minimize the stress placed on bones, muscles, nerves and soft tissue.

• Ergonomically designed clipboards promote the natural curvature of the hand; allow for comfortable grip and resting in the inner arm.

• Use a rolling adjustable table or stand to rest clipboard or mobile device.

**Physical tips:**

• Most importantly, regardless of what you are doing take a break and switch things up.

• Stop when you experience pain, numbness, or other hand and wrist related symptoms. Your body is telling you to take a break.

• Take care of your overall health—eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, get an adequate amount of sleep, and manage your stress.

• Wear a wrist splint while sleeping. A splint can keep your wrist in a neutral position (not bent too far forward or back) and reduces the stress on your fingers, hand or wrist.

• Always maintain good posture (head up, shoulders back, sit up straight, no slumping) in all aspects of the job, whether sitting at the computer or standing and taking notes.

**Stretching tips:**

• **Finger Pulls**—pull or stretch your fingers over the back of the back of the tops of your wrist and hold for 10 seconds.

• **Fist Resistance**—Make a loose fist, palm up, and use the opposite hand to press gently down against the clenched hand. Resist the force with the closed hand for 5 seconds, keeping the wrist straight.

• **Stress Ball**—use a stress ball to stretch your hand muscles.

• **Forearm Stretches**—Stretch your forearms by extending your arm straight out in front with palm up and gently pulling your fingers down toward the floor and hold for 10 seconds.

• **Finger Flexes**—Put hands together in prayer position. Spread fingers apart as far you can, then “steeple” the fingers by separating palms of hands, but keeping fingers together. This stretches the muscles of the palm, carpal tunnel structures and median nerve.

• **Hand Shake**—this is simply shaking your hands as if to air dry them to help prevent cramping of the flexor muscles and the median nerve.

• **Wrist Circles**—Hold your second and third fingers up, and close the others; draw five clockwise circles in the air with the two fingertips; draw five more counterclockwise circles. Repeat with your other hand.

• **Fingers/Hand Stretch**—Clench the fingers of one hand into a tight fist; release, fanning out your fingers; do this five times. Repeat with the other hand.

• **Shoulder Shrugs**—Perform in a standing position. Keep both arms at your sides and shrug your shoulders backwards in a rotating motion 10 times. Pause for 30 seconds. Repeat in a forward rotation.

• **Arm Turns**—Holding your arm out at your side with your elbow fully extended and palm facing the ceiling, curl your wrist and fingers as you turn your forearm to the right. Hold this position for 5 seconds than turn your forearm to the left and hold for 5 seconds. Relax and repeat 10 times.

• **Arm/Shoulder Stretches**—Drop your arms to your sides with palms facing behind you and gently lower the shoulder on the affected arm. Don’t lean, just reach down towards the floor and let the shoulder drop. Slowly bend the wrist until your palm is facing upward and fingers pointing behind you. You can increase the stretch by tilting your head in the opposite direction bringing the opposite ear closer to the opposite shoulder.

Stretching helps counteract the tightening and shortening of the muscles and ligaments that can occur after hours of work—which in turn, can cause inflammation and potentially increase the risk of hand and wrist pain.

Because of the demands we place on our hands and wrists, hand and wrist pain and discomfort are common conditions. Don’t choose to ignore the symptoms or “live with it”. Instead, take care of yourself and take action to help alleviate and prevent hand and wrist pain. Notify your supervisor if you experience persistent hand and wrist pain and discomfort.