

Mommy Thumb: Causes, Treatments and Prevention

Many new mothers experience inflammation near the thumb and wrist from repeatedly lifting their heavy babies under their arms. This condition, commonly called mommy thumb, is also medically known as De Quervain's tendinitis or tenosynovitis. It is not only limited to mommies or women, but may also occur in men and other people who frequently use smart phones. Among new mommies, it usually occurs in older mothers with heavy babies, especially in those who frequently have to lift them up from low cribs. It results from pointing up the thumb and wrapping the other fingers around the back of the heavy baby, which will cause inflammation in the tendons below the thumb.

What Are the Symptoms of Mommy Thumb?

A mommy thumb causes pain and swelling around the base of the thumb. It can also make pinching or grasping movements difficult when you are doing some activities. You may also experience a sticking sensation in the thumb when you try to move it.

Other movements of the wrist and forearm may increase the pain. Without treatment, the pain may affect the thumb and forearm.

When Should You See a Doctor?

If you have tried to relieve your symptoms by avoiding the usual movements that make your thumb sore, apply cold compress to the area and take pain-relievers such as Advil or Motrin, but if the pain does not go away after a few days, you should consult your doctor. Or if it affects your movements and interferes with daily activities, see a doctor as soon as possible.

What Causes Mommy Thumb?

1. Overuse of Wrist

Long term use of the wrist is the usual cause of mommy thumbs. Overuse of the major wrist tendons and lower thumb results from repeated gripping, grasping, clenching, pinching or wringing with the hand. This results in irritation and thickening of the sheath covering the tendons, which restricts their movement. It is more common among women, especially among those who are pregnant or taking care of babies. Some jobs or activities involving repetitive wrist movements may also cause de Quervain's tenosynovitis.

2. Direct Injury of Wrist or Tendon

Direct injury and scar tissue formation can cause restriction of movement in these tendons.

3. Arthritis

Inflammation of the joints, such as rheumatoid arthritis, can also cause mommy thumb.

In general, middle-aged people from 30 to 50 have a greater risk of developing this condition than others.

How Can Mommy Thumb Be Treated?

1. Medications

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) may be taken to relieve swelling and inflammation. Corticosteroid injections may be needed if the swelling does not go away. Early treatment results in faster recovery.

2. Hand Therapy

Physical or occupational therapy for mommy thumb involves immobilizing the wrist using a splint or a brace, avoiding repetitive movements, avoiding pinching movements, and applying a cold compress to the area affected.

A therapist who is also a **certified hand therapist (CHT)** can recommend wrist exercises to relieve pain and strengthen your muscles and make a well-fitting splint that suits you.

3. Surgery

In some cases, your doctor may recommend surgery to release the sheath surrounding the wrist tendons, which will reduce pressure, restore their function, strengthen your wrist and prevent recurrence.

What Can Be Done to Prevent Mommy Thumb?

1. Change Breastfeeding Position

2. Give Wrist Time to Heal

3. Use a Splint

4. Lift Baby with Palm

Additional Tips

- **Organize an accessible nursery.** Keep bins of diapers, wipes and other items on changing tables or shelves within easy reach – it not only keeps you close to your child while on the changing table, but it also saves you from overextending joints.
- **Make dressing easier.** Dress infants and toddlers in clothing that's slips on and off easily, such as Velcro shoes.

Travel:

- Stay organized, remove extraneous things from diaper bags/purses, the 8 extra bags you are probably taking!
- Get a light weight foldable umbrella stroller for travel, don't lug your giant one!
- Always bring snacks in reusable containers and an outfit change.

Infant Carriers

- Get a carrier to help hold infants and toddlers.
 - o The carrier should do for you what your arms are supposed. A carrier should position baby so that her weight is on her bum, not her crotch; hold baby so that her knees assume a spread "W" shaped position that puts them slightly higher than the bum, allowing for proper hip positioning; allow baby's spine to curve naturally while preventing baby from slumping into a chin to chest position; should position baby high and tight on the wearer, keeping baby's weight close to the wearer's center of gravity

For school aged children

- Check the weight of their backpack, it should not exceed 20% of your child's weight
- Get a lighter weight or rolling backpack (although I know some schools don't allow rollers)
- Prep the night before. Have children bathe; backpacks, snacks and lunches packed; clothes laid out; and anything else they need all ready to go at night to ease the morning rush.