

Repetitive Strain Injuries(RSI)

WCB: Questions and Answers

By Dan Jarvis

Repetitive strain injuries (RSI) is a general term used to describe various types of injuries or conditions to muscles, tendons or nerves caused by repetitive movements of any part of the body. These injuries or conditions most commonly happen to workers who are using computers, but also occur in many other types of manual labor such as operation of drills, milling machines, vibration equipment, etc. The most common of these conditions are: bursitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, epicondylitis (tennis elbow), rotator cuff syndrome, tendonitis, trigger finger and general nerve damage. Your doctor is best suited to identify specifically which it may be.

RSI is caused by overusing the muscles of the hands, wrists, arms and shoulders on a repeated, usually daily, basis often in awkward and unaccustomed positions. This overuse is made worse if it is performed in cold weather; in poorly organized workstations or on badly designed equipment; or if there is a lack of rest or variation in the work performed. Stress at work or home is often a significant, but overlooked factor.

One should watch particularly for symptoms such as pain or tenderness in the muscles or joints, tingling or numbness in the hands or arm and loss of strength or feeling in the hand. Initially these symptoms may occur only at work and go away after work. This stage may go on for weeks only to be replaced, if untreated, by constant pain or aching and loss of strength. If not dealt with the pain will be there all the time and the condition may become untreatable. If this occurs you may be permanently crippled.

It is absolutely necessary to deal with the condition as soon as you feel the symptoms. If treated early there is a very good chance of recovery. If you leave it, the longer it goes on the less likely you will recover. Your doctor is best able to tell you what you need to do to bring the symptoms under control, but these usually include rest; anti-inflammatory drugs; hot and cold packs; and may go on to steroid treatment, physiotherapy, chiropractic treatment or even surgery. Remember: **DEAL WITH IT AS SOON AS YOU FEEL IT! BEING BRAVE MAY CRIPPLE YOU!**

Also, if you think this may be happening, report your concerns to your supervisor and see your doctor. Then keep a careful record of what and how you feel after work, later in the evening, on the weekend and when starting work. This record will be an important tool if you have a need to apply for WCB.

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