

# Upper Limb Disorders

## Some General Information & Advice

So you've been diagnosed with work related upper limb disorder or think you may have RSI (Repetitive Strain Disorder) or your arm just plain hurts. The first and most important piece of advice is DON'T PANIC!

All you need is to get a handle on things - once you feel like you have some control you should instantly feel better about things.

**The first step in managing things is to seek assessment, treatment and advice.** With this sort of problem the sooner you get to see a health professional the better. A good starting point is a physiotherapist or GP. Try to find one that specialises in musculoskeletal disorders and ideally upper limb pain. If he or she can't help you they will be able to refer you to someone who will.

**Secondly, make it your mission to understand what's going on.** If you are receiving treatment or being managed by a professional, they're probably the best person to ask for an explanation of what they think is happening with your problem. If you search on the internet remember to keep things in perspective. There is loads of useful information out there but try to keep an objective view of things.

In general, there are two groups of upper limb disorders: those that are easily diagnosed as a particular condition (these include tennis elbow, golfers elbow, tenosynovitis, peritendinitis crepitans, De Quervains tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, ganglions, frozen shoulder and nerve impingement) and those that are non specific. Non specific arm pain can be confusing as it seldom has strong diagnostic signs and may involve symptoms such as night pain, clumsiness, tingling, coldness, tightness and burning. Quite often the symptoms are vague, intermittent and flit from one area to another. This may make the sufferer doubt themselves and wonder whether their pain is real. A lot of research has been done however and health professionals are now beginning to understand the condition. It certainly does exist. And it can be treated - its just a question of finding a specialist in the know.

RSI means very little as a diagnosis - it literally means that there is some type of strain due to repetition so it is a term usually avoided by the medical profession.

Don't become over-obsessed with "your diagnosis" rather focus on positive ways of managing your problem.

**Finally, do what you can to manage things yourself.**

- Take the advice of professionals seriously. If you are advised to rest - do so! If you are given exercises - do them! It's a waste of time all round to take advice half-heartedly.
- Stay positive. Focus on the things you achieve rather than pain, or what you can't do. If someone asks how you are, don't answer in terms of pain ("Better. The pain was a bit less yesterday") but rather in terms of achievement ("Better. I chopped the veg for supper yesterday").
- Don't expect a smooth ride to recovery. You are likely to have bad days interspersed with the good. Just take them in your stride and think of them as being a temporary setback. Take each day as it comes.
- Try to keep busy. Don't stay at home, looking at the walls and feeling sorry for yourself. You will eventually think yourself into being sick! Make sure you keep up sources of pleasure and leisure whatever they are. If you can keep up exercise or hobbies without exacerbating your problem then go for it.
- Think about what makes your pain worse and see if you can change that. If chopping vegetable makes things worse, use the food processor.
- If you use a computer for home or work, get advice about changes you can make that may help you. It is important to seek the advice of someone who has in-depth knowledge of what your problem is as well as what the ergonomic options are for reducing the risk you are exposed to. The advice may involve equipment and furniture recommendations as well other strategies such as breaking, task rotation etc.
- Lastly, remember you are not alone. There are many people suffering from upper limb disorders. Contact them if you think this may benefit you. The RSI Association is a fantastic resource see [www.rsi.org.uk](http://www.rsi.org.uk)