

# Overuse of Handheld Devices

Handheld devices such as the Blackberry, iPhones or iPads are an increasingly important part of many people's lives. Unfortunately, the overuse of these devices can lead to injuries including wrist and thumb strains, muscle tension in the neck, and eye strain.

## Signs and Symptoms of a Handheld Device Related Injury

### Pain in the thumb

The most common thumb problem is referred to as "texting" thumb. Its medical name is "DeQuervain's tenosynovitis", an injury to the sheath or tunnel that surrounds two tendons leading into the thumb.

### Pain around the wrists

Sometimes it feels like a 'bracelet' of pain. Osteoarthritis at the wrist can also be aggravated by overuse of hand-held devices.

### Pain at the top of the shoulder and neck

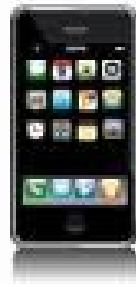
Neck discomfort and stiffness may be from the muscles of the neck 'Tension Neck Syndrome' or from the position of the vertebrae. Looking down flattens out the vertebrae in the neck resulting in a forward head position, sometimes called 'Turtle necking'.

### Eye strain

Viewing a screen with small fonts can lead to eye strain and headaches.

## Why Using a Handheld Device Can Cause Pain

Frequent users of handheld devices may be at risk of injury. The main risks include awkward postures of the thumb, repetitive motions, and holding body positions for long periods of time (static postures).



## How to Prevent Handheld Device Related Pain

"The key to preventing hand, neck and eye strain is to limit the use and duration of the handheld device."



- Maintain good posture for the wrists, thumbs and neck.
- Pay attention to your grip and how you are holding your device. Keep wrists upright, straight and reduce continuous gripping.
- Use a normal speed of motion. Try not to rush and type fast.
- Alternate among using your thumb, index finger and a stylus, if available.
- Investigate the use of devices that reduce grip forces like a tablet holder or external keyboard.
- Take breaks, stretch, and avoid typing for more than three minutes at a time.
- Keep text messages short. Return only urgent emails and use key shortcuts (cut, paste, etc.) and abbreviations.
- Stop when it hurts and learn to recognize overuse aches and pains.
- When choosing a device consider its weight, size and how it 'fits' in your hand.