Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)

Understanding symptoms, causes and recovery

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)

A guide to reducing discomfort and staying active



What is repetitive strain injury?

RSI describes pain and discomfort linked to repeated movements, sustained positions or overuse of muscles, tendons and nerves. It often affects the hands, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders and neck.

Understanding RSI

RSI is not a single diagnosis, but a group of conditions associated with repetitive or sustained activity.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Recognising symptoms and understanding assessment

Common causes

Repeated typing, mouse use or manual tasks; prolonged postures; forceful or awkward movements; too few breaks; sudden workload increases; stress and fatigue.

Common symptoms

Aching or soreness, stiffness, tingling or numbness, weakness or reduced grip, burning or throbbing sensations. Symptoms may worsen during or after activity.

How is RSI diagnosed?

Your clinician will review symptoms and work or activity history, then assess movement, strength and posture. Other conditions, such as nerve compression, may need to be excluded. Scans are not always necessary.

What can make symptoms worse?

Long uninterrupted tasks, awkward positions, forceful gripping and rapid increases in activity can contribute to symptoms.

Early steps

Vary positions and tasks, take regular short breaks and adapt aggravating activities. Avoid prolonged complete rest unless advised.

Exercises and movement

Gentle movements to support comfort and function



Exercise safely

Start gently and increase exercises gradually. Keep movements comfortable. Stop if symptoms worsen and ask your physiotherapist for individual advice.

Making exercise part of your day

Take short movement breaks, change positions regularly and build activity up as symptoms allow.

Treatment and self-management

Practical ways to manage repetitive strain symptoms

Activity modification

Reduce or adapt activities that aggravate symptoms. Vary tasks, take frequent short breaks and return to activity gradually.

Physiotherapy

A physiotherapist may recommend stretching, strengthening, posture advice, movement retraining and pacing strategies.

Workplace and ergonomic advice

Adjust desk, chair and screen position; avoid prolonged awkward postures and consider suitable equipment.

Pain relief and recovery

Heat or ice may help if appropriate. Ask a clinician or pharmacist about pain relief. Recovery may take weeks or months.

When to seek further help

Seek assessment if symptoms worsen, persist, include ongoing numbness or weakness, or affect daily life.

B-Well Physiotherapy Services

0300 303 4811

bwell.mskberkshire@nhs.net

www.bwellberkshire.co.uk