

My Wrist Hurts When I Type or Use a Computer

Understanding Work-Related Wrist Pain

Why Does Using a Computer Hurt My Wrist?

Computer-related wrist pain is one of the most prevalent occupational health complaints of the modern era. Keyboard and mouse use keeps the wrist in sustained, awkward positions for hours at a time — slightly extended at the keyboard, ulnar-deviated with a mouse — while repetitively activating the same tendons and nerves thousands of times per day. Over time, this combination of sustained posture and repetitive loading irritates the structures that make wrist movement possible.

Several distinct conditions can cause wrist pain with computer use, and identifying which one you have determines the best treatment approach.

What Is Most Likely Causing This?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (most common):

- Numbness or tingling in the thumb, index, and middle fingers
- Symptoms often worse at night
- Caused by sustained wrist flexion compressing the median nerve

Wrist Tendinopathy:

- Aching pain in the wrist and forearm without numbness
- Tenderness over specific tendons on the back of the wrist
- Related to repetitive wrist extension during typing

De Quervain's Tenosynovitis (thumb-side wrist pain):

- Pain specifically at the thumb side of the wrist
- Often associated with heavy mouse use or trackpad use with the thumb

Intersection Syndrome:

- Pain and squeaking 2–3 inches above the wrist on the back of the forearm
- Less common, but seen in people doing heavy keyboard work

Ergonomic Factors That Drive Wrist Pain

- Keyboard positioned too high — forces wrist into extension
- Mouse too far from keyboard — sustained shoulder and wrist reaching
- No wrist/forearm support — forearm muscles fatigue faster
- Tight gripping of the mouse — increases tendon load
- Hours of unbroken computer use without rest breaks

What Can I Do Right Now?

- Lower your keyboard so wrists are neutral or slightly flexed — not extended
- Use a vertical or ergonomic mouse to reduce forearm pronation
- Take a 2-minute break every 30 minutes — stretch fingers, wrists, and forearms
- Use a lighter touch on the keyboard and loosen your mouse grip
- Consider a wrist rest — but only use it between keystrokes, not while typing

The Good News

Computer-related wrist pain responds very well to physical therapy combined with ergonomic corrections. In most cases, identifying and fixing the specific postural or movement drivers — with PT guidance — resolves symptoms without requiring time off work. A physical therapist can also perform a functional ergonomic assessment of your workstation.

With PT and ergonomic correction, most work-related wrist pain resolves fully without requiring time away from work.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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