



Work Related Upper Limb Disorders (WRULD)

WRULD are increasingly seen by the team of expert hand therapists at the London Hand and Wrist Unit (LHWU), particularly at the clinic at 31 Old Broad Street. WRULD can be classified as any musculoskeletal condition of the upper limb and neck caused or exacerbated by work. These problems have various different names and are commonly called repetitive strain injuries or cumulative trauma disorders. Estimates of the cost for WRULDs in the U.K. are limited but may be between 0.5% and 2% Gross National Product.

There is much research in this field and a picture is emerging of the most commonly implicated physical risk factors. Namely, these are fixed working postures and repetitive motions. All of the following have been cited as risk factors:

- Awkward posture
- Forceful exertions
- Repetitive motions
- Localised pressure/contact
- Vibration
- Temperature

The most significant psychosocial risk factors are a combination of:

- Job demands
- Lack of control (low decision latitude)
- Lack of social support

The risk of experiencing a WRULD is greatest with high exposure to both physical and psychosocial risk factors.

For clinical purposes WRULD are split into types 1 and 2. Type 1 are specific pathological conditions. At the LHWU, all patients presenting with symptoms will be assessed thoroughly to establish if they have a Type I WRULD. The treatment is then targeted in relation to the specific diagnosis. Example pathologies include:

- Tendonitis
- De Quervains tenovaginitis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Triangular fibrocartilage complex pathologies
- Thoracic outlet syndrome

Type 2 WRULD are non specific pain syndromes. Common symptoms include:

- Tiredness, heaviness, vague aching
- Symptoms aggravated by working
- Diffuse pain
- Persistence despite rest
- Subjective feelings of stiffness

Incorporating:

Hand Therapy for WRULD aims to be holistic, empowering and informative. A thorough assessment is carried out including and analysis of work carried out and an environment and work station assessment.

The main stay of treatment involves education including the following:

- Pain management
- Ergonomic advice
- Working patterns advice
- Time frames of recovery and self management
- Neck and thoracic mobilising exercises
- Activity levels and general fitness
- Strengthening programmes
- Stretching exercises
- Writing grip patterns
- Return to work programmes

Therapeutic modalities used by hand therapists include:

- Splinting
- Exercises
- Soft tissue massage
- Realistic goal setting
- Activity planning and development
- Acupuncture
- Posture re-education
- Cervical and thoracic mobilisations
- Neural mobilisation
- Home programmes

Many people with WRULDs can make a good recovery if referred to appropriately trained professionals. To make an appointment with a hand therapist (expert specialised occupational therapist or physiotherapist) at the LHWU please call 020 7483 5090. Treatment is covered under medical insurance schemes. For further information please look at our website on www.londonhandunit.co.uk. Clinics are located at 31 Old Broad Street and at the Wellington Hospital, St Johns Wood, The Portland Hospital, Great Portland Street and the Lister Hospital near Chelsea Bridge.

Elaine Juzi, Clinical Specialist in Hand Therapy, October 2008