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Triathlon
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Injuries

TRI BAR PAIN

Q Since I started using tri bars I've developed a pain at the base of my right thumb and side of my wrist, particularly when holding the bars. I've never had this problem before, but I'm wondering if it's related to some DIY I was doing?

C. Bush, Newcastle



Tri bars can cause stress on your thumb tendons and aggravate the condition deQuervain's tenosynovitis

Photo © Daily Carr/Triathlon.org

Physiotherapist

Tim Pigott says...



What you're describing sounds like a case of deQuervain's tenosynovitis, which is an inflammation of the sheath that contains two of the tendons for moving the thumb (known as the abductor pollicis longus and extensor pollicis brevis). Repetitive movements can cause inflammation of the sheath, and is called tenosynovitis. It's likely the DIY you've been doing has overstressed the sheath and tendon, resulting in inflammation. A simple test (called the Finkelstein manoeuvre) reproduces the pain: using one hand, make a fist around the thumb and then tilt the hand towards the little finger. If it hurts, you've got deQuervain's.

You should see your GP or pharmacist about using anti-inflammatory medication, your GP or physio may also give you a steroid injection (Cortisone) that can be extremely effective at settling it down. However, you will need to rest it for up to two weeks.

A splint or brace is often useful to rest the tendons (your GP or physio can supply you with one of

these), allowing them to fully heal, and you need to avoid any aggravating movements or positions.

Another option for reducing the inflammation is ice massage – holding an ice cube and massaging the area until it melts.

Once the inflammation has settled, you may need to mobilise the tendons by doing gentle exercises to ensure they're gliding smoothly in their sheath, and then do strengthening exercises if the thumb has become weaker. Holding an elastic band between your fingers and thumb, and

then slowly moving the thumb away from the palm and fingers, is a simple yet very effective exercise.

You may find that changing the bars to ones with more upturn will reduce the stress on the tendons. If you have used that set-up successfully for a couple of years, then once this problem has been resolved you should be able to return to the straight bars. However, I suggest you slowly reintroduce that position, with repeated short intervals on the bars, so it doesn't flare up again.

"A SPLINT OR BRACE IS OFTEN USEFUL TO REST THE TENDONS, ALLOWING THEM TO FULLY HEAL"

Training

HAND CRAMPS

Q I get cramp in my hands during swim sessions, and they really ache afterwards.

Obviously this doesn't stop me swimming, but it's uncomfortable and I'm worried it's a sign that I'm doing something wrong. How can I fix it?

Susan Flowers, Norwich

Triathlete

Richard Stannard says



Tension in a swim stroke can cause the onset of cramp. Good swimmers are very relaxed in the stroke. Their hands are loose during the front crawl recovery, and during the pull phase their wrists are strong but their hands and fingers are not held too firmly. A common error in front crawl is to cup the hand to create a paddle. However, a hand pulling through the water, flat, with the fingers slightly apart, will create a much larger surface area with which to pull.

To change a swim stroke you need to create a new habit: swim multiple repetitions of single lengths with the above technique, taking a break of 20 seconds between each length in order to reduce fatigue.



A relaxed hand with fingers slightly apart creates a much stronger front crawl stroke