

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

The tendons that extend (straighten) your thumb pass across the wrist through a canal over the wrist bone just beneath the base of your thumb (Fig. 1). These tendons can become swollen or inflamed (called *tendinitis*), which will lead to pain when the tendons are pulled through this tight canal. The disease is named after the doctor who first described it.

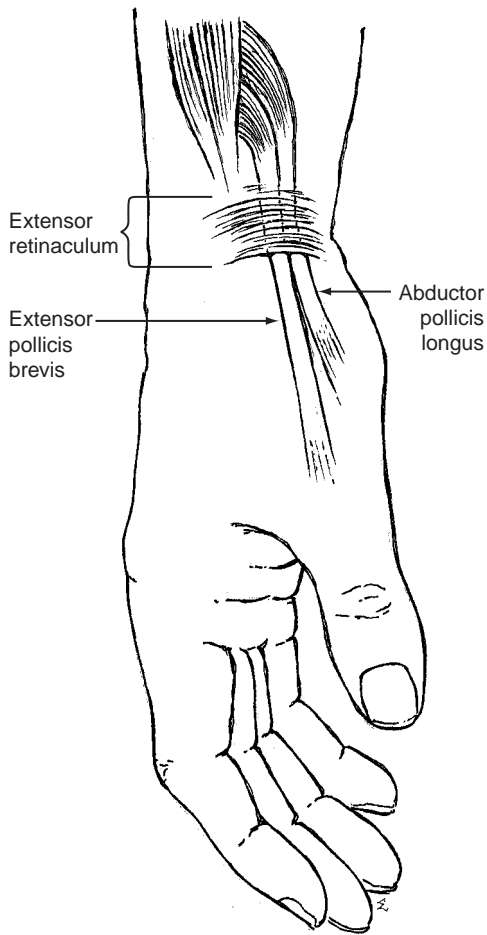


Figure 1. The tendon that opens the thumb is squeezed and inflamed by a ligament lying over it. The operation to correct this involves cutting the ligament so that the thumb tendon is free to move.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms begin with pain along the thumb side of the wrist. This can be a very sharp, severe pain that makes it difficult to use the hand.
- Activities such as pinching or gripping that require the tendon to be pulled through its canal can aggravate the condition and increase the pain.
- Most of the time there is only low-grade discomfort when the wrist or thumb is moved in an exaggerated way. More severe involvement can lead to pain that can prevent a good night's sleep.

- Tingling or numbness is not part of this condition. It is not a nerve condition but a tendon problem.
- De Quervain's disorder is often associated with the repetitive use of the hands or with overactivity that can lead to inflammation of the tendons, which then causes the symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS

- The diagnosis is usually made by taking a detailed history of the symptoms and performing a thorough physical examination. More sophisticated studies are generally not needed.
- X-rays may be taken to be certain there are not other conditions that are causing the pain at the base of the thumb.
- Specific thumb and wrist motions tend to reproduce the symptoms and will help make the correct diagnosis.
- Sometimes a clicking or grinding sensation can be felt over the region in the wrist where the inflamed and swollen tendons are being pulled through the tight canal.

○ TREATMENT

Treatment usually begins with conservative measures; they are successful in a large percentage of cases.

- Injections of cortisone around the tendon can diminish the inflammation and lessen the symptoms. Often, more than one injection is necessary.
- You may need to wear a splint to try and rest the inflamed tendons. Also, activities that tend to aggravate the condition will need to be modified.

If you continue to have symptoms that inhibit your activities despite the above treatments, an operation may be necessary. This consists of releasing the tight canal that the tendons pass through. It will heal back at a larger size, which will not tend to catch on the tendons and cause recurrence of the inflammation.

PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION

- You will have an examination of your blood and possibly of your heart (EKG) before the operation.
- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the operation.
- Shower or bathe as usual on the morning of the operation.
- You may be given medicine that will make you feel drowsy before you are brought to the operating room.

□ OPERATION

- The operation will be done under one of two types of anesthesia. *Local anesthesia:* A fine needle is used to inject the tissue over the canal to make the area numb. *Regional anesthesia:* The nerve supplying the arm will be injected with anesthesia.
- During the operation, you may feel some tugging but not pain.
- The operation generally takes less than 1 hour.

POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- You will be taken to a recovery room. When your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing are stable and you are completely alert, you should be able to go home that same day with a responsible adult.
- As with any operation, complications are always possible. With this type of operation, they can include injury to the small nerves that supply sensation and that lie over the inflamed compartment at the base of the thumb and wrist. Even careful retraction of these nerves can lead to loss of sensation (temporary or permanent) on the finger side of the incision at the base of the thumb. Scar sensitivity is another common complication. Fortunately, this usually resolves with time.
- Arrangements will be made for your medicine, follow-up office visit, and stitch removal.

+ HOME CARE

- Resume your usual activities when possible.
- Take medicine as prescribed for your pain.
- Arrangements may be made for you to see a therapist who will help you regain motion and function of your thumb and wrist.

℘ CALL OUR OFFICE IF

- You develop any unusual signs or symptoms.
- The incision becomes red or swollen, or there is drainage from it.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.