

# Arm Pain & Hand Pain

## Signs & Symptoms

- Pain ranging from dull to severe. Increased pain with movement.
- Numbness. Weakness. Tenderness.
- Stiffness. Swelling.



*Repeated use of tools that vibrate the hand and wrist can lead to RMIs.*

## Causes

There are many causes of arm and/or hand pain.

Common causes are:

- Arthritis. Repetitive motion injuries (RMIs), such as carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Circulation problems, such as angina and a heart attack
- Skin rashes. Skin wounds. Infections.
- Injuries, such as sprains, strains, and broken or dislocated bones

## Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause and how severe the problem is.

## Questions to Ask

Are any **signs and symptoms of a heart attack** present?

NO

YES



If you have been diagnosed with angina, do you have aching in one or both arms and chest pain that do not respond to prescribed medicine? Or does the pain not go away in 10-15 minutes?

NO

YES



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Did you have a serious injury that caused arm or hand pain and/or are any of these signs present?

- A bone sticks out or bones in the injured area make a grinding sound.
- The injured body part looks crooked or the wrong shape.
- After a crushing injury, pain increases.
- You can't move the injured body part or put weight on it.
- The injured area is blue, pale, numb, or feels cool, but the same limb on the other side of your body does not.

YES



Call 911!

NO

Do you have any of these problems?

- Burning pain in a finger, especially at night and/or when you bend your wrist and fingers upward then downward
- Shooting pains from your hand to your wrist and sometimes to your forearm.
- Numbness and tingling in your first 3 fingers and thumb
- Hand pain, numbness, and tingling for more than 2 weeks
- You haven't been able to make a fist for over a week.

YES



NO

Do you have any of these problems?

- Your shoulder hurts, is stiff, and is hard to move.
- You have pain, tenderness, and limited motion in your shoulder, arm, or hand.
- Tenderness and pain over an elbow
- Pain when you twist your arm or hand, such as when you use a screwdriver or play tennis
- A weak grip
- Any **sign of an infection?**

YES



NO

Do you have pain and stiffness in joints with these problems in your fingers?

- Puffiness, hardening, and thickening of the skin
- Your skin looks shiny or waxy or blue in color.
- Coldness and numbness

YES



NO

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Do you have any of these problems?

- A growth on your wrist that feels tight, hard, and painful
- Your hands turn pale, then red, and get painful and numb when exposed to the cold and/or when you are stressed.
- Pain in your arm or hand wakes you from your sleep.



NO

Have you started to have a hard time writing with a pen or pencil, opening a jar, or buttoning a blouse or shirt?



## Self-Care / Prevention

### To Help Treat Arthritis

- Follow your doctor's advice for exercise, medications, and the use of supplements, such as glucosamine, chondroitin, and flaxseed oil.
- Follow a healthy diet. If you are overweight, lose weight gradually (1-2 pounds a week). Losing weight too fast and fasting raise uric acid levels and increase the risk for gout.
- Protect your joints from injuries. Wear knee pads, etc.
- Don't put too much stress on your joints. Take regular pauses and breaks from activities that do this.

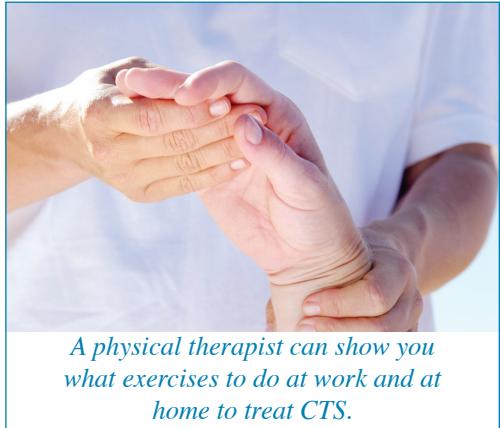
### To Help Prevent Osteoarthritis

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Do regular physical activity, but don't overdo it. If you feel pain, stop.
- Prevent falls and sports injuries.

## For Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)

This is much easier to treat and less likely to cause future problems if it is found early. Once CTS is diagnosed, treatment includes:

- Preventing further damage
- Wearing a wrist brace, splint, etc. as advised by your doctor. This may need to be worn during the day and while you sleep.
- Taking OTC medicines to reduce pain and swelling.
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Cortisone shots in the wrist area
- Surgery, if needed



*A physical therapist can show you what exercises to do at work and at home to treat CTS.*

## For more information, contact:

Arthritis Foundation

800.283.7800

[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)

[www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)