

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)



What is Repetitive Strain Injury?

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) is a term used to describe **pain and discomfort caused by repeated movements, sustained positions, or overuse** of muscles, tendons, and nerves. It most commonly affects the **hands, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, and neck**.

RSI is not a single diagnosis but a **group of conditions** related to overuse.

Common causes

RSI can develop due to:

- Repeated movements (typing, mouse use, assembly work)
 - Prolonged poor posture (desk work, screen use)
 - Forceful or awkward movements
 - Insufficient breaks or recovery time
 - Sudden increase in workload or activity
 - Stress and fatigue, which can increase muscle tension
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Common symptoms

Symptoms may develop gradually and can include:

- Aching, soreness, or pain
 - Stiffness or tightness
 - Tingling or numbness
 - Weakness or reduced grip strength
 - Burning or throbbing sensations
 - Symptoms that worsen during or after activity
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How is RSI diagnosed?

RSI is usually diagnosed based on:

- Your symptoms and work or activity history
- Physical examination of movement, strength, and posture
- Excluding other specific conditions (e.g. nerve compression)

Scans are not always needed.

Treatment options

Most cases of RSI improve with **simple, conservative treatment**.

Activity modification

- Reduce or adapt aggravating activities

- Avoid prolonged repetitive tasks where possible
- Gradually return to normal activity levels

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy may help with:

- Stretching and strengthening exercises
- Postural correction
- Movement retraining
- Manual therapy if appropriate
- Education on pacing and load management

Workplace and ergonomic advice

- Adjust desk, chair, and screen height
- Use supportive equipment if needed
- Take regular micro-breaks

Pain management

- Ice or heat as advised
- Simple pain relief if appropriate
- Relaxation and stress management strategies

Exercises and movement

Staying active is important. Your physiotherapist may prescribe:

- Gentle stretches
- Strengthening exercises
- Nerve gliding exercises (if appropriate)

Avoid complete rest unless advised, as this may delay recovery.

How long does recovery take?

Recovery time varies depending on:

- Severity of symptoms

- How long symptoms have been present
- Ability to modify activities

Many people improve within **weeks to months** with the right management.

Self-care tips

- Take regular breaks (every 30–60 minutes)
 - Vary tasks and positions
 - Maintain good posture
 - Stay physically active
 - Manage stress and sleep well
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When should I seek further help?

Seek advice if:

- Symptoms are worsening or not improving
 - You have persistent numbness or weakness
 - Pain is affecting work or daily activities
 - Symptoms are present at night or at rest
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Outlook

RSI is usually **manageable and reversible** with early intervention, education, and activity modification. Most people return to normal activities with appropriate support.

If symptoms persist, speak to your GP or physiotherapist for further assessment and advice.