

Main - CuringTendonitis

How I Cured My Tendonitis (not Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, but it feels similar)

Starting in 1997 I started feeling pain in my wrists when I used the computer for long periods of time. Over time it happened more and more frequently so that my wrists often hurt even when I wasn't using the computer at all.

Like many people with wrist pain I thought I had Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. However, at one point (I think it was 1999) I went to a doctor to get a test which measured nerve damage in my wrists and it turns out there wasn't any nerve damage. That was good news because that meant that what I had was Tendonitis. Tendonitis, over a period of time, can cause Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (by damaging the nerves in the wrists), but at least at that point in time there wasn't any nerve damage. Even so, my wrists still hurt a lot whenever I typed. This really worried me because I'm a computer programmer, so being able to type is critical to my ability to continue to work.

What is Tendonitis

Tendonitis (in the wrist) is a swelling of the tendons in the wrist which puts pressure on the nerves in the wrist. This makes you feel pain in your wrist as well as your fingers. Despite the pain in the fingers there's nothing actually wrong with the fingers. The pain originates entirely from the pressure on the nerves in the wrist.

Stretching

After about 6 months of this I went to a doctor and she gave me some wrist exercises to do. Those stretches helped. In particular, there's a stretch where I extend one arm out straight and then pull back on that hand (with the palm facing outward) using my other hand and hold it there for about 15 seconds. I then repeat on that hand and pull back with the palm facing inwards. I would then repeat that for the other hand. There were other stretches, but I eventually stopped doing them because that stretch was the only one that actually helped me. Doing those stretches allowed me to continue using the computer, but I'd have to do them every 20 minutes and they would only give me temporary relief.. Furthermore, they were only a temporary fix. Over time my wrists continued to worsen.

The Kinesis Keyboard

I'm a programmer and I was really worried that I might eventually not be able to use the computer at all. In 1999 I bought a [Kinesis keyboard](#) and that helped a lot! It didn't cure it, but it stopped aggravating the problem and I was able to type for longer periods of time without the pain increasing to the point where it hurt enough that I needed to stop typing.

In particular, the Kinesis Professional is the keyboard that I now swear by. I would NEVER go back to a standard keyboard. I bought one for work and one for home. Before I used the Kinesis Professional I tried other "ergonomic" keyboards, but most were designed in such a way that, in my opinion, they actually aggravated the problem because they were convex and forced me to twist my wrists outward. The key is that the Kinesis Professional has a concave design which allows my wrists to sit in one position and reach all the keys without having to twist my wrist to reach keys like the enter or backspace key. The enter, backspace, and spacebar keys are underneath my thumbs which makes them much easier to press than on a standard keyboard. My wrists don't have to twist in order to reach for keys and twisting the wrist is what aggravates tendonitis the most.

The Pro-Ice wrist ice wraps

However, it's really the [Pro-Ice](#) wrist ice wraps that really more or less cured my tendonitis. In 2000 I bought four Pro-Ice wrist ice wraps. I kept 2 of them in my freezer at home and 2 of them in the freezer at work. Whenever I felt my wrists

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swelling up, but before I actually started to feel pain, I would stop using the keyboard and put on those wrist wraps. I would then put my wrists (while in the wraps of course) on my legs and lean over to force the ice in the wraps to be in contact with my skin as much as possible. After about 20 seconds it really starts to hurt (because of the cold), but I would force myself to stay like that for at least 60 seconds. I would then take both of the wraps off my wrists.

At that point I would be able to type for a while without feeling any pain (usually about an hour or so). When my wrists started to feel swelled up again then I would put on the wrist wraps for 60 more seconds. It was kind of annoying to have to do this, but after a while it became somewhat routine.

Here's the wonderful part. After doing this for about 3 months, the need to use the ice wraps actually became less frequent. Another 3 months after that and I was really more or less cured!

Note that yes, I tried just using an ice pack or a bag of ice cubes, but neither of those things helped anywhere near as much as the Pro-Ice wrist ice wraps because the wraps are designed so that the ice has maximum coverage of the entire wrist area. Ice cubes are all over the place and don't line up to touch the skin enough. Ice packs tended not to be cold enough because of the layer of fabric between the ice and the skin. The ice wraps are pretty cheap (only about \$25 as of 2002-06-05), so they're definitely worth it.

Epilogue

I am writing this on 2002-June-05. My wrists have remained more or less cured for approximately 2 years now. I still use the computer just as much as I always have, yet I only need to use the ice gloves maybe once every few months. (I've noticed that my wrists tend to swell up when I don't get enough sleep.)

I attribute the remission of my tendonitis completely to the Pro-Ice wrist ice wraps and I attribute my continued lack of problems completely to my Kinesis Professional keyboard. If I use a standard keyboard it definitely aggravates my wrists a little bit. Also, other convex "ergonomic" keyboards actually are more aggravating to my wrists than a standard keyboard is, so I have absolutely no desire to ever stop using the Kinesis Professional keyboard.

My understanding of how tendonitis is caused is as follows: Tendonitis is an inflammation of the tendons in the wrist which causes pain. Moving the fingers and wrist cause the wrist to be inflamed. Continuing to move your fingers and wrist while the wrist is inflamed causes more inflammation. The reason why using the ice wraps caused the tendonitis to go away is because it reduced the inflammation enough so that when I was typing I wasn't aggravating the problem further.

In other words, wrist movement causes inflammation. Wrist movement while the wrists are inflamed causes more inflammation which causes some sort of aggravation in the wrists which makes it easier for inflammation to occur. If you reduce the inflammation then you allow the wrists to heal themselves so that you reach a point where wrist movement no longer causes inflammation.