WORK RELATED UPPER LIMB DISORDERS

About This Guide

Think you might be suffering with RSI and want more information about making a claim?

In this guide, we explore the different types of RSI, who is likely to develop each type and look at why it’s really important to make a claim against your employer if you feel they are responsible for you developing the condition. Employers have all sorts of legal responsibilities to protect against RSI nowadays, and if they are negligent, you may be eligible for compensation.

CALL: 0800 122 3130
Repetitive-straininjury.co.uk
RSI & Why You Should Claim
Are you afraid of claiming from past or current employer for your injury? RSI is like any accident at work or industrial disease and your employer has a duty of care to you at work.

Types of RSI
Have you been recently diagnosed with a repetitive strain injury? Read more about the different types of work related upper limb disorders (WRULD) you can develop.

New Types of RSI
Work in an office or with a smartphone or PDA for work? Read about new repetitive strain injuries resulting from changes in how we use mobile devices at work.

Employer’s Responsibilities
Employers in the UK have a legal obligation to prevent RSI in the workplace under the Safety Act of 1974 and the Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

RSI at Work
Read how manual work, working on an assembly line or at a supermarket checkout can cause the condition, as can typing on a computer.

What if you develop RSI?
Employers in the UK have a legal obligation to prevent RSI in the workplace under the Safety Act of 1974 and the Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Don’t Suffer in Silence
Don’t suffer in silence if you have been diagnosed with RSI. Speak to your employer and seek advice about making a claim.
RSI is one of the most debilitating conditions around. It’s described by the NHS on its website as: “a general term used to describe the pain felt in muscles, nerves and tendons caused by repetitive movement and overuse.” According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) musculo-skeletal injuries, which is the name the medical profession commonly gives to repetitive strain injuries, affected approximately 526,000 UK workers between 2013/14, and accounted for almost 8.3 million working days or between £5 million to £10 million being lost to the UK economy over the same time period. Around six UK workers will leave their jobs as a result of RSI every day according to research by the TUC.

The condition comes in many forms. It can strike suddenly or build up over a number of years and no-one is immune from it. Those in the building trades, nursing, agriculture and health care industries are the most likely to develop the condition according to the TUC report. Causes of the condition include heavy lifting, manipulating materials and using a computer keyboard. But, as you’ll see later, more and more people in all sorts of walks of life are being afflicted.

Symptoms are worse when you’re carrying out certain tasks, usually of a repetitive nature. If nothing’s done at this stage, your RSI will only get worse and move from a temporary to constant condition. You’ll be in constant pain and affected areas can swell up causing further discomfort if treatment isn’t sought sooner rather than later.
**TYPES OF REPETITIVE STRAIN**

**Bursitis**
This is where the bursa — a sac full of fluid found in bits of the body like the knees, elbows and shoulders — become inflamed. The bursa is designed to help muscles and tendons move in separate directions without causing friction. Bursitis occurs where repetitive movements of the joints are involved.

Your chances of developing bursitis increase if you have to spend a long time kneeling down or resting on your elbows at work or carry out tasks where you have to use your wrist, forearms or elbows a lot. Twisting, pulling and gripping all contribute to it, so if you’re a carpenter or musician for example, you could develop bursitis as a result of your work.

**Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**
A relatively common condition, carpal tunnel syndrome affects the small carpal bones and ligaments in the wrist. The carpal tunnel, which separates these two areas, has a small nerve in it called the median nerve, and squashing it causes you to feel pain, numbness and tingling, pins and needles and loss of strength in the wrist and fingers. Dry skin is often an accompaniment too.

Confusingly, Cubital tunnel syndrome has many similar symptoms but it’s the Ulnar nerve in the elbow that’s affected here. You can tell which one you have as carpal tunnel syndrome usually occurs in the first three fingers of the hand whereas Cubital tunnel syndrome affects the ring and little fingers. Both are equally painful and are caused by using keyboards at work.

**Tenosynovitis**
Like many other forms of RSI, tenosynovitis happens when tendons become inflamed and swell up. It can last for a few days or take months to clear up. DeQuervain’s syndrome is one form of tenosynovitis and, like the others, responds well to treatment. Also known as mother’s wrist or washer woman’s sprain, this is another common form of RSI.

**Diffuse Repetitive Strain Injury**
Lots of repetitive strain injuries that are hard to diagnose are grouped together as diffuse RSI. The term’s used to describe injuries on all parts of the body and where there aren’t physical symptoms like swelling for the medical profession to use in ascertaining exactly what the problem is.

An increase in the amount of office jobs and office workers is thought to have triggered more of this sort of injury. Symptoms include pain, numbness, weakness, tingling and cramp in whichever part of the body is affected.
## TYPES OF REPETITIVE STRAIN

**Dystonia**

You might know this under its more familiar name of writer’s cramp. Anyone suffering from this condition will experience muscle spasms and twisting movements mainly in the fingers. Other parts of the body can be affected though, and sufferers can’t control the movements.

They’ll have to use more force than is necessary to do simple tasks like grip a pencil, hence the condition’s name. Musicians and office workers are likely to be affected by dystonia and it’s recognised as an industrial injury in the UK.

**Gamekeeper’s Thumb**

Gamekeeper’s thumb was named so after Scottish gamekeepers who injured their thumbs while at work many years ago. It’s caused by a strain to the ulnar collateral ligament which is attached to the middle joint of the thumb, and the joint next to the web space of the thumb. If this ligament is stretched too much, as it was in the case of the gamekeepers in Scotland as part of their job, the thumb becomes swollen and sore. It can become unstable and may need surgery in severe cases.

With this form of RSI bruising occurs and the condition needs an x-ray to properly diagnose it.

**Epicondylitis**

You’ve probably heard of this condition but not by this name. A lot of sporting injuries are forms of epicondylitis, particularly Tennis Elbow or Golfer’s Elbow.

The condition affects the tendons that connect to the bone at the elbow causing inflammation. It’s made worse by repeated strain being placed on the forearm muscles from constant twisting and extending of the arms.

**Ganglion**

Ganglion cysts, which can be as small as a pea or as large as a golf ball, form when tissues that surround joints become inflamed and full of fluid.

They’re totally painless and harmless in most cases but can be painful particularly if they’re on a joint or knuckle, and if you knock them it could bring tears to your eyes. They disappear with time, however, and can be treated by draining with a needle.
Types of Repetitive Strain

Raynaud’s Disease

This is a pretty nasty form of RSI and can be terribly painful. If you suffer from Raynaud’s disease, the nerves in your hand shut off the blood supply causing the hands to turn white or even blue due to the constriction. Episodes can last anything from a few minutes to several hours.

Those affected usually work in jobs where there’s a lot of vibration, like factories with machines, or where the working conditions are very cold.

Tendinitis

Carpal tunnel syndrome and epicondylitis can be grouped under tendinitis. Injuries of this type typically affect the shoulder joints, elbows, wrists and hands, and are characterised by swelling of the tendons in them. It’s painful and sufferers will also experience a lack of mobility in these areas.

Tendinitis is caused by repetition and is one of the most common forms of RSI.

Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

This affects the area between the lower neck and armpit in what’s known as the thoracic outlet. Pain, tingling and numbness occur in the arm, shoulder and neck when the thoracic outlet is compressed.

Jobs with a lot of lifting and where there’s strain put on the shoulders, neck and arms can cause the condition.

White Finger

White finger or vibration white finger affects, you won’t be surprised to know, the fingers! It’s common among road workers and construction workers who use heavy vibration tools like jackhammers and pneumatic drills, and is a form of Raynaud’s Disease. It gets its name because one of the symptoms is a white finger as the blood vessels are damaged in the hands, forearms and wrists. As many as one in 10 workers who regularly use vibration tools will develop the condition and it usually takes a decade or so to appear.
NEW TYPES OF RSI

The last few years have seen more RSI conditions materialise and text neck - coined by chiropractor Dean Fishman in 2012 -, Blackberry thumb and iPad hand are now recognised as genuine repetitive strain conditions caused by excessive use of mobile technology (although Nentenditis was seen as a real problem as far back as the 1990s). And a doctor has also become the first in the world to diagnose a patient with “Whatsappitis” after a 34 year old woman visited him with sudden severe pains in her wrist following a six-hour marathon session on the app responding to Christmas messages received while she was at work.

These new conditions are happening because people are spending, on average, between two to four hours a day looking at screens causing them to bend their heads at unnatural angles. The human head can exert up to 60lbs, which is four stone, of extra pressure on the neck and spine when bent in this way to look at a mobile phone.

Doctors and physiotherapists report more and more office workers are coming to them with pains in their heads, necks and arms, along with numbness, due to spending longer hours looking at computer screens, mobiles when on call, and tablets many of them need for their jobs. Left untreated, the symptoms could develop into something far more serious like osteoarthritis and herniated discs of the spine.

Many of us are becoming increasingly reliant on smartphones for our jobs and are expected to remain constantly in touch even when out of the office or at home in the evening.

Regularly checking smartphones for text messages and emails is adding to the problem. And unusually for repetitive strain injuries, it’s younger workers who are being affected by the newer conditions with two thirds of under 35s taking time off work for back pain caused by work. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy in the UK has said if the problem isn’t tackled now, we could be faced with an epidemic in the future.

DONT SUFFER IN SILENCE

Many people suffer in silence and don’t tell their employers about RSI, and that’s usually down to fear. The fear of creating a “bad feeling”, being singled out as a trouble maker at work or even getting sacked. But the truth is you can’t get fired for speaking out and you might even be entitled to compensation if your employer’s found negligent. If you’re unsure about a claim, then speak to us today: 0800 122 3130
NEW TYPES OF RSI

READ MORE ON REPETITIVE-STRAININJURY.CO.UK
Employers in the UK have a legal obligation to prevent RSI in the workplace under the Safety Act of 1974 and the Safety at Work Regulations 1999. While these cannot completely stamp out RSI, following these acts’ recommendations can certainly reduce cases.

The rules and regulations are different for the various types of occupations. For example, those employing factory workers will have to adhere to The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 while business owners with a lot of office staff are required to follow the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992.

Under the manual handling regulations employers should:

- Avoid the need for hazardous manual handling as far as is reasonably possible by employing other means, such as automation
- Assess the risk of injury from hazardous material handling that cannot be avoided. In-house best practices can be developed to deal with this
- Reduce the risk of injury to the lowest level possible. This should be done until the costs in time or money are too great in relation to the benefits gained

Employees too have certain obligations to meet under these regulations and are expected to follow appropriate safety systems, use equipment properly, work with their employer in health and safety, tell their employer if they identify any issues, and make sure their work activities don’t put others at risk. Routine assessments of different tasks should also be carried out on a regular basis by the employers to look at the dangers of back pain and RSI. Factors like the environment, the people involved and the task itself should all be considered. Accident books have to be kept and examined regularly and risk assessments done.

For the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, employers have to ensure that all display screen equipment has regular work and ergonomic assessments carried out, and that regular breaks are built into workers’ daily routine. Computers, monitors, mice, keyboards, laptops, touch-screens, and even desks and chairs are included in the regulations, so anyone who regularly uses this type of equipment falls under the regulations.

They also state office workers should carry out other, less repetitive tasks such as making phone calls or filing as part of their daily routine. An employer can be found negligent if they don’t sign up to and follow health and safety regulations, and any employee who develops RSI as a result could be entitled to compensation.

Often RSI in the workplace can be stopped through a few simple changes in how you do things. Amazingly there’s been cases of RSI caused by chairs, tools or equipment that doesn’t fit naturally with the body, benches and workstations being positioned too low, too high or too far away from the body, machinery that moves too fast to operate comfortably, poorly designed workspaces where you have to bend, stretch or twist, and even environments where regular tight deadlines force workers into staying late or not taking breaks when they should.

If you sit at a desk all day, making sure your keyboard, screen and mouse are correctly positioned will reduce your risk of RSI. Keeping a good posture really helps too so don’t slouch in your chair and adjust it properly so it supports you and you can rest your feet on the floor. And if you’re on the phone for large parts of the day, consider swapping the handset for a headset and don’t cradle the handset between your ear and shoulder as this can lead to neck strain.
There’s lots of jobs where the chances of developing RSI is pretty high. Doing manual work on an assembly line or at a supermarket checkout can cause the condition, as can typing on a computer for hours at a time as mentioned earlier.

But some other professions you might not think of can lead to RSI. Cleaners stand a good chance of getting it as they have to constantly twist their arms, wrists and hands. Pushing and pulling heavy industrial vacuums and floor polishers can cause problems with the back and shoulders too.

Painters and decorators face similar battles as their work also involves repetitive movements of the wrist and arms. They often have to work in cramped conditions and on ladders too where they face the added complication of neck strain.

And drivers and truckers have reported developing RSI in their shoulders from constantly fighting with heavy steering wheels, clunky gear boxes and bad UK road conditions. Many of the county’s HGV drivers are aged over 40 and their years behind the wheel have caught up with them.

Road workers dealing with vibrating machinery and commercial sewing machine operators are also at risk from developing RSI, as are those in the nursing profession who have to lift patients regularly.

In March 2014, Steve Davidson was diagnosed with RSI in his right wrist following 18 years working as the Queen’s official clock winder and cleaner. There’s even been cases of politicians with RSI from shaking hands in the run up to the Scottish Referendum. Alex Salmond was seen wearing a wrist support as he trekked round the country indulging in marathon hand shaking sessions. In total, it’s thought he shook the hands of thousands of people and may have damaged the tendons in his wrist as a painter and decorator or cleaner might do. And with a UK general election due in the next few months, perhaps there will be a plethora of MPs also suffering from RSI.
What if you develop RSI from your work?

Compensation claims against employers for RSI are nothing new, and a survey as far back as 2003 found it was the biggest reason for compensation cases among call centre workers.

If you feel you have developed RSI from your work, the first thing to do is speak to your employer. There may be a designated safety rep in your organisation so speak to them first so that they can escalate the issue. If there isn’t one, approach someone in a position of authority that you like and trust. Record everything in writing so you have records to refer to and for using in evidence. If there’s a union, becoming a member could help your case too.

As well as having a legal duty of care to reduce RSI, your employer also has a legal duty of care to stop symptoms getting worse if anyone develops the condition. And it is up to you to let them know if you think RSI might be starting as a direct result of your job.

Once your employer’s aware of your concerns, they can try and address them. The last thing they want is for you to be off sick so the chances are they’ll try and help you. It’s in their interest as much as yours for you to be fit and healthy so you can perform your duties.

Together, you should be able to come to some agreement about how best to deal with the issue so you don’t face long-term absence, and stop your RSI becoming a real health concern. It might mean you having to change your job function for a while or take a few extra breaks so you don’t put extra strain on the affected part of your body. Working together is the best option by far for everyone concerned.

There are, of course, occasions when employers don’t fulfil their duties and fail to look after their employees. Breaching the regulations mentioned earlier is a serious offence in the eyes of the law whether it’s done deliberately or accidentally, and employers can face hefty fines and punishments if they break them. Organisations like the HSE regularly punish companies who neglect their obligations around preventing RSI or musculo-skeletal injuries, and there are hundreds of private prosecutions against employers every year.

If you’re not sure whether you have RSI, there’s a really simple and reliable way you can diagnose it for yourself before seeking professional medical help. We’ve described the symptoms of RSI earlier in this guide and if you suffer from them while you’re doing a certain task only for the symptoms to disappear when you stop, chances are you’ve got RSI.

It’s important to note that RSI doesn’t happen overnight. It creeps up on you over time – often many years – and will get worse if you continue to do the task that caused it.

Only a doctor can properly diagnose whether you have RSI and what type you have so always seek their opinion if you think you have the condition. But don’t get signed off sick too soon. Instead see if you can change role for a while or get some help with alternative technology or so on to stop your symptoms getting worse. Let your manager know you’re going to the doctors too, tell them why and keep them informed.
Claiming For RSI

You may have a claim for RSI at work if:

- Your employer was aware of the risks of RSI but didn’t do anything to prevent it
- Your employer didn’t implement safety measures to stop or reduce the cause of your RSI
- Your condition came about because your employer failed to protect you from tasks that could cause or aggravate your RSI
- Your employer made you use poorly-designed equipment or work at a badly-designed workspace
- Your employer failed to ensure you had the correct number of breaks while at work
- Your employer made you work in the same position for a long time or in a repetitive manner
Many people suffer in silence and don’t tell their employers about RSI, and that’s usually down to fear. The fear of creating a “bad feeling”, being singled out as a trouble maker at work or even getting sacked. But the truth is you can’t get fired for speaking out and you might even be entitled to compensation if your employer’s found negligent.

If you feel you need to go down the road of bringing a compensation claim against your employer, it’s important to know they can’t get rid of you for simply taking this route. In fact, if they do attempt to take this course of action they may then find themselves in the middle of a case for unfair dismissal or constructive dismissal. The reason you’re bringing the claim is because you’ve suffered an injury and possibly financial loss as a direct result of their actions. It could cost them thousands of pounds and hundreds of lost hours so adding more claims on top of it won’t be on their agenda.

Not saying anything could do more harm than good as carrying on doing the task that’s given you RSI will only makes things worse, causing you more pain and discomfort. It may even mean you’ll get to a point where you can’t physically do your job any more.

Remember, sacking someone for claiming compensation is against the law in the UK, and you could actually be doing your employer a favour in the long run. If you’ve developed RSI from carrying out a particular task in your workplace, there is no guarantee that others won’t suffer in the same way. Nipping it in the bud now could stop your employer having to pay out thousands of pounds for lots of negligence cases in the future.

The majority of compensation claims for RSI are usually lodged against former employers as the condition forces people to give up their work. But if you feel that you have a case whilst working still somewhere, you are best to make the claim if things are to get better.

If you were injured by badly maintained machinery or the company was lacking in another area of health and safety, you’d probably have no qualms about bringing a claim, so think about RSI in the same way. Loss of earnings and pain and discomfort are real side effects of repetitive strain injuries, and you’re entitled to claim compensation.

DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

If you were injured by badly maintained machinery or the company was lacking in another area of health and safety, you’d probably have no qualms about bringing a claim, so think about RSI in the same way. Loss of earnings and pain and discomfort are real side effects of repetitive strain injuries, and you’re entitled to claim compensation.

If you’re suffering from a repetitive strain injury because of work, call: 0800 122 3130 or visit: Repetitive-straininjury.co.uk to arrange a free call back.
There have been many cases of workers successfully bringing a claim against their employers while they’re still working there so there’s nothing to stop you if you’re serious about it. Back in 2003, a lady who was employed by the government developed RSI, which was subsequently diagnosed as De Quervain’s Tenosynovitis, caused by repetitively using a computer to cut and paste names and addresses from one spreadsheet to another. She reckoned around 15 hours over two days was spent clicking a mouse as part of the task.

Not long afterwards she started feeling pain in her hands and mentioned it to a workstation assessor who was carrying out a routine check. She was promised it would be followed up but it never was. Eventually the pain was so severe, it forced her off work and her GP prescribed her ibuprofen to reduce the swelling.

While she was off, the employee decided to bring a claim against her employer as they had failed in their duty of care, she had now started to spend a lot of money on medication and wrist supports and so on. After a year, during which she was off work for seven months, her case was settled in court with the judge ruling in her favour.

The advice she gives is: “If your employer’s negligence has led to your injury, don’t be afraid to look into ways of claiming compensation for work time lost or for treatments etc.”

So don’t suffer in silence. Keeping quiet can make things worse, both for you and your employer. RSI is as serious as any other work-based accident or incident, and you could miss out on compensation if your employer’s been negligent in any way. Companies will have insurance in place for situations like this and they’ll have their own solicitor to fight their case. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been there either; your rights remain the same.

If you believe you have developed RSI as a result of your work and your employer has been negligent, you could be entitled to compensation.

If you’d like to discuss your situation, you can call us on:

**0800 122 3130**

For more information, please see [Repetitive-straininjury.co.uk](http://repetitive-straininjury.co.uk).