



Texting tenosynovitis

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During a 3-month period, a right-handed 20-year-old dental student experienced increasing pain and tenderness over the radial side of her right wrist and proximal thumb.

She had recently been using her mobile phone to send 2500 texts per month, each consisting of around 150 characters. Text messages consisting of traditional and predictive text were generated at a speed of about four characters per second using her right thumb. Clinical examination revealed tenderness over the tendons of extensor pollicis brevis and abductor pollicis longus at the wrist and distally (Figure 1), consistent with de Quervain's tenosynovitis.

After learning to text with her left thumb instead, the patient's original symptoms resolved but she has since developed similar mild symptoms in her left hand.

Figure 1. Site of tenderness represented by the shaded area



Since the first generation of mobile phones were launched in the early 1980s, ownership has mushroomed. The total number of mobile phone users worldwide is currently around 2.3 billion and Nokia predicts that this figure will exceed 3 billion by 2009. In New Zealand alone, there were more than 3.5 million mobile phones in 2005.¹

There are only two previous reports of texting tenosynovitis. Yoong (2005) observed this condition in school children in Singapore who were sending more than 100 text messages per day.² One of these cases was treated with corticosteroid injections. Menz (2005) reported a 13-year-old girl with tenosynovitis induced by text messaging; her symptoms resolved after rest, topical naproxen, and the use of both thumbs to operate her phone.

Text messaging has become increasingly popular in the last 5 years, particularly among young people. Texting tenosynovitis may be more common than we think.

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