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Dorsal Wrist Impingement Syndrome (DIS)

Dorsal wrist impingement syndrome (DIS) is the most common cause of pain on the radial (thumb) side of the wrist. Patients with DIS have increased pain when they bend the wrist backwards beyond 35 degrees. Push-ups, and similar activities, contribute to the development of DIS.

When the wrist bends backwards, the bones of the wrist grind against one another. This damages ligaments and cartilage. Initially there may be intermittent pain and leakage of joint fluid. The joint fluid may form a lump on the wrist called a ganglion. If the damage continues the wrist ligaments rupture, full thickness cartilage injuries occur, and chronic wrist pain develops.

Early DIS is treated with rest and avoidance of wrist extension; not bending the wrist past 35 degrees. The use of wrist neutral splints (such as carpal tunnel splint) or wrist tensors may help. For most patients this will lead to pain resolution. If a ganglion is present this will also resolve.

Medical therapy includes anti-inflammatory medications and cortisone injections. Surgery is reserved for severe persistent pain. Some patients respond to wrist denervation surgery; removal of the wrist pain receptors. Severe cases may require a surgical fusion; this is a wrist stiffening surgery. A fusion is a significant surgery with a 6 – 12 month recovery period.

