

SO YOU'VE JUST GOT RSI

What can you do to stop it in its tracks?

At work

Talk to your employer if you feel confident they will help. (A recent Australian study showed that more than half are very helpful!) They may be able to make changes to your workstation or offer you different work. Given this kind of help, many people recover quickly. Think about making a workers' compensation claim and be aware that you have a limited time within which to file one. For more information, talk to your union or Google "workers compensation" and the name of your state.

Take breaks. Even short ones will help, by giving your muscles a rest and allowing them to recover. There may be natural breaks in the work that you can take advantage of. If, for example, you work at a computer and a page is taking a little time to load, take your hands away from the keyboard and rest them in your lap.

Change the way you work. Think about which tasks are the most difficult and painful for you and see if you can reduce them, or at least break them up. For example, if clicking on your mouse is your biggest problem, clickless software will make a big difference. Do a bit of research to find out the safest way to work at your particular job. In general, it's better to use larger muscles rather than smaller ones and work below shoulder level and close to your body.

Build as much variety as you can into your work. If you've got several jobs you need to do at work, mix them up! Do ten minutes of one, then ten minutes of another – because you're almost certainly using different muscles for each task.

Learn to negotiate – or even say "no". If you feel overwhelmed by your workload, try to negotiate with your employer on a realistic workload and what should be your top priority each day. If you need help to develop these skills, have a look at this website: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/coping-with-stress/art-20048369>

Be less conscientious! Being overly conscientious or too much of a perfectionist is one contributor to RSI. So if you think this applies to you, scale down your expectations of how good your work needs to be or how much you need to do. For more ideas, have a look here: <https://www.wikihow.com/Control-Perfectionism>

Learn how to recognise and deal with stress. Stress affects your body as well as your mind; for one thing, it makes your muscles work harder than they otherwise would. Stress can also make you tighten your muscles unnecessarily and that's not a good idea. Think about what's stressing you and how you can deal with it. This is something you may need help with from a counsellor or psychologist. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044494>

Don't work through severe pain. This is probably the worst thing you can do. The pain is a message saying "STOP!" And don't use painkillers to help you keep working. They're only covering up the pain, not curing the injury.

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Talk to your doctor about **getting some leave from work**. Early on, rest can cure an overuse injury; if taken later, it only tends to give you short-term relief. For more on the science of rest, have a look at this website: <https://www.painscience.com/articles/art-of-rest.php>

And generally....

Learn to relax your muscles. This is probably one of the most important skills you can learn to help you recover. There are some great relaxation apps out there; for more information have a look at this review: <http://rsi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/No.22-Meditation-Apps.pdf>

Find a doctor who knows something about RSI – some don't. While you may have a doctor who is great for helping you deal with everyday ailments, they may not know much about RSI. It's okay to go to another GP for your RSI – a doctor who specialises in sports medicine could be a good choice.

Rethink what you do outside work. There's no point taking a break from work to give your muscles a rest if you're overworking them at home or on the sports field. You probably need to rethink your priorities here as well and learn to ask for help. It's okay to have takeaway meals for a short period and a dirty house is not the end of the world!

Stay active. Along with learning to relax your muscles, this is probably one of the most important things you can do to help you recover. Walk, run, jog, dance ...

whatever suits you. This will help to maintain good blood circulation, which will help your injured muscles to recover. Not only that, but exercise can help you to stay mentally healthy and deal with the emotional effects of your injury.

Stay engaged and socially active. Make sure to keep up with your friends even if you have to adjust the way you do things. Some people find this a good time to learn a new skill, such as public speaking. Do things that make you feel good, like getting out into nature or singing in a choir.

Ask for help. Don't struggle on with tasks that are making your RSI worse if you can get help from a partner, friend or flatmate. Being independent is great, but it's okay to be dependent while you can't manage as you normally would, and it should only be for a little while.

Do your own research on treatments. Some can cause harm, such as some injections and traction. The RSI Association has a quarterly newsletter with regular updates on recent research on RSI treatments. Most don't have the evidence to show that they work!

And finally, **join the RSI Association – it's free!** Our newsletter has lots of useful tips from other people with RSI and information on how to manage at work and at home, as well as easy-to-read summaries of the latest research.



JOIN US FOR FREE

at www.rsi.org.au

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