Wrist pain in older patients is usually caused by the onset of arthritis. Wrist arthritis commonly develops as a result of trauma to the wrist area that may have occurred long ago. Perhaps you had even forgotten about it and don’t remember any injury.

Complicated Joint
To set the stage you need to have a course in “the wrist joint”.

The wrist consists of eight little bones which connect to each other by many small joints. One row of wrist bones connect to the five metacarpal bones in the hand and the upper row of wrist bones articulates with the two forearm bones (radius and ulna).

In brief, the wrist is an engineering marvel that is truly amazing. Whoever thought this up really knew what they were doing!!!! The wrist gives your hand a great range of motion and strength, but is subject to frequent injury also.

Durable
Arthritis due mainly to wear and tear doesn’t usually happen in the wrist. The main cause of arthritis in the wrist is past trauma such as a wrist bone fracture or torn ligament. For all we use our wrists it is amazing that wear and tear arthritis doesn’t happen often.

Causes of Wrist Pain
- Trauma to bones and ligaments leading to arthritis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Gout
- Lupus (autoimmune disease)
- Lyme disease

Special mention of rheumatoid arthritis is in order. It is the second most common form of arthritis. The joint lining (synovium) is attacked by our own immune system resulting in joint inflammation. This leads to destruction of cartilage and bone. Wrists become worn, painful, swollen and stiff.

Examination
Many regular readers know what I am about to say. Examination is extremely important in trying to figure this out. The doctor has to touch the patient to examine them, not just look at them. Sigh. Sometimes I think physical exam is a dying art. Too bad, but I hear it all the time. “The doctor didn’t even touch me.”

There are lots of other causes of wrist pain. I have to figure it out for you.

X-rays and Other Tests
A plain x-ray study is normally sufficient. Occasionally an MRI, CT or bone scan might be needed, but not too often. Some basic lab tests in some cases are needed to help make the diagnosis.
RA Diagnosed

If it is determined that you have rheumatoid arthritis it often requires specialized care of an internist who specializes in arthritis, i.e. a rheumatologist. They have available to them several disease modifying and immune suppressing drugs which I almost never prescribe.

We have an agreement – they don’t do surgery and I try not to prescribe immune suppressing drugs! Works out better that way.

Treatment

In non rheumatoid wrist arthritis there are many things that can be done for our patients to decrease pain and increase function.

Since I am out of my allotted space I will have to continue the wrist arthritis topic next week.

See you then.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

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Please check it out. Be well.

Good health, good life, all the best to you.

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