

Smart pain from your smartphone

<http://yourhealth.asiaone.com/print/content/smart-pain-your-smartphone>



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With the introduction of smartphones, people are now filling spare moments working, Web searching, blogging or playing mobile games.

However, some smartphone users may face an **unexpected side effect pain in their fingers and wrist.**

Lee Kyung-joon, a 37-year-old businessman, started using his iPhone a few months ago. **Recently, he started feeling numbness in his palm when playing mobile games for more than 30 minutes.**

"At first I thought I was affected by the electric current. However, after consultations with a doctor, I found that the long periods of cellphone usage put pressure on my wrist," he said.

Doctors say the number of people who complain about similar symptoms has been growing recently and some severe cases develop carpal tunnel syndrome, which used to be more common among workers on assembly lines.

"Stop it, Phone - you're squeezing my nerves"

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the median nerve, which runs from the forearm into the hand, becomes pressed or squeezed at the wrist. The median nerve controls sensations to the palm side of the thumb and fingers, as well as impulses to some small muscles in the hand that allow the fingers and thumb to move.

Symptoms usually start gradually, with frequent burning, tingling, or itching numbness in the palm of the hand and the fingers, especially the thumb and the index and middle fingers.

The disease is three times more common in women because the carpal tunnel is usually narrower in women than in men, experts say.

Along with housewives who use their hands and wrists a lot while doing chores, these days young people and middle-aged men complain about the symptoms due to their excessive use of computers and cellphones, smartphones in particular.

Most smartphones have touchscreens with which users have difficulty pressing the right keys. In order to not misspell, the users may have to straighten the index finger and that causes tension in hands and wrists.

"After hours of blogging or playing mobile games, you can feel the index finger becoming numb. Then you need to suspect carpal tunnel syndrome," said Sung Chang-hoon, head of Yonserang Hospital.

"Younger generations may have no problems right now. But those in their late-40s or older should stop using the cellphone if any symptoms appear."

Prevention

Doctors offer some tips for prevention of severe symptoms.

They recommend that smartphone users try not to bend their wrists backward for long periods and make conscious efforts to use different fingers, not only the index finger, and put the phone on the desk while texting.

If you feel any numbness or swelling in your hands, you should stop using the phone and relax your hands in warm water for five to 10 minutes.

You can wear splints to keep wrists straight and some anti-inflammation medicines are also helpful, they said.

Many people use a smartphone to check e-mail and do other work even in front of their computer. But unless you are on the move, it is better to use computers, which have wider screens and keyboards, they added.