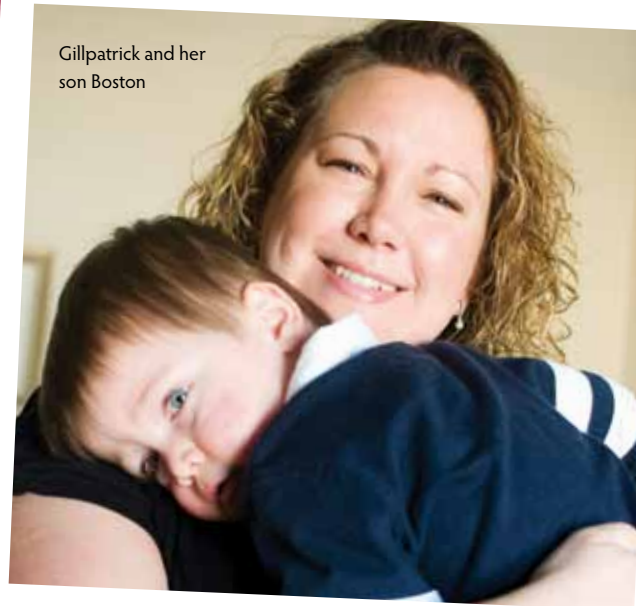


Jami Gillpatrick holds her daughter Brooke with a firm grasp that is pain-free



Gillpatrick and her son Boston



Treating Mommy Thumb

Katyites Share Tips for Overcoming the Syndrome

Written by Wendy Clark & Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

Katy mom Jami Gillpatrick first heard about mommy thumb while watching *The Today Show*, immediately identifying with the story. A mom of 2-year-old twins Boston and Brooke, she had been experiencing pain in her right hand below her thumb and down to her wrist for about a month. When she saw the report on TV, she recognized her symptoms in the description of mommy thumb. "I had injured my thumb as a teen from hyper-extension and the pain was very similar," she shares. "So, I thought it must be some kind of tendonitis." In reality, mommy thumb is a colloquial name for De Quervain's syndrome. It also is sometimes referred to as "washer woman's wrist," "gardener's thumb," and in the age of smart phones, "Blackberry thumb."

Recognizing the Syndrome

Dr. Jeffrey Budoff is a Katy area board certified orthopedic surgeon specializing in hand, wrist, elbow, and shoulder conditions and treatment. "De Quervain's, or washer woman's wrist, actually affects the wrist, not so much the thumb," he says. "Basically, repetitive motions [like picking up a child under the arms with your thumb pointed upwards] cause swelling and inflammation in the tendon sheath. This, in turn, causes the sheath to shrink and become stiffer." Pregnancy can also be a contributing factor, since fluid in the wrist can shift during this time, decreasing the amount of space in the wrist for tendons to move freely and thus increasing inflammation.

Dr. Budoff shares that though the condition is most commonly found in women, he has seen cases where men have been affected, as well. The condition is especially prevalent in people of both genders who enjoy gardening and spend much time pulling weeds. For Gillpatrick, the first sign of the condition was pain. "It flares up when I pick up one of the kids incorrectly, or if I've been busy at work, typing on the computer a lot," she says.

Treating Early On

For now, Gillpatrick is able to treat her pain and inflammation with ibuprofen. But what happens when pain relievers aren't enough? As with other medical conditions, Dr. Budoff stresses that early detection of De Quervain's syndrome is key. "If the diagnosis is made early on, we can treat it with injections," he says. "Usually, if the diagnosis is made within about four to six months of the onset of symptoms, injection treatment is effective."

Dr. Budoff describes the injection to treat the syndrome as a means to decrease pressure in the wrist, comparable to letting the air out of a tire. "The injections work the same way by decreasing inflammation in the restricted space of the wrist," he says. Unfortunately, if the pain has lasted longer than six months, there is a chance that the injections will have decreased efficacy, and more radical treatment may be required. Ultimately, the condition can be corrected with surgery, which Dr. Budoff performs with local anesthesia on an outpatient basis.

Preventing Pain

So how can Katy parents prevent the pain altogether? "Try to avoid the inciting activity," Dr. Budoff says. That doesn't mean parents have to stop picking up their children. Rather, Dr. Budoff advises, "Lift with the palm up or palm down, and don't lift [your kids] with the thumb pointing up." Gillpatrick's advice is similar and comes from the way she's had to adapt her daily activities.

"Try modifying the way you use your hand," she says. "The twins both weigh 35 pounds and picking them up is what causes the most discomfort. I've started trying not to use my thumb or the crook of my hand as much when picking them up. Now, I try to use more of my fingers under their arms. That seems to do the trick. [I think] the less you use that portion of your hand, the quicker it will heal." KM

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— Katy mom Jami Gillpatrick

WENDY CLARK suffered from mommy thumb several years ago, but is now back to happily typing at her keyboard, pain free.

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