

3Qs: Two thumbs down

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Mobile-phone users who send dozens—or even hundreds—of text messages per day may have begun to notice pain, tingling or numbness in their thumbs from excessive button pushing. Northeastern University news office asked Jack Dennerlein, a professor of physical therapy in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences, to explain the growing health concern among obsessive smartphone users: the so-called texting thumb.

How serious of an injury is texting thumb? Have other cases of physical injuries related to smartphone use been reported?

To date most of the injuries have been [pain](#), soreness, and discomfort reported with thumbs, wrists, shoulders and the neck. The most serious cases reported are severe tendinitis, with pain sometimes reaching levels that prevent people from maintaining thumb-intensive tasks. Most cases, however, report low levels of pain symptoms. The best study examining such injuries completed in Canada suggests that longer duration of texting increases the likeliness of reporting pain at the base of the thumb.

Children have embraced technology at a younger age than even before. What physical effect can long-term smartphone use have later in life or on future generations?

We don't yet know the long-term effects. Based on other types of injuries to the musculoskeletal system, however, there is a chance that symptoms from acute exposures can lead to chronic issues, such as premature arthritis. To date, though, there has yet to be a prospective study to thoroughly answer this question.

What are some ways to prevent or alleviate finger and wrist pain associated with excessive smartphone usage?

There are several things you could do:

- Take breaks. Increasing the frequency of breaks helps even if they are short.
- Switch up how you text. If you often use your thumbs, switch to using your fingers to share the load.
- Use different devices to text, such as a desktop or notebook computer.
- Use preprogrammed responses in your smartphone.
- Use voice controls or speech recognition if possible.

Provided by Northeastern University

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