

## Relieving Wrist Pain



**W**rist pain, a frequently heard complaint, can be a **challenging issue** for a physician and physical therapist, and frustrating for the patient because it has an enormous number of causes. Since diagnostic tools such as radiographs can appear normal, the physician and physical therapist must obtain a **thorough history** and perform a **thorough examination** to determine the cause of a patient's wrist pain. Some of the more common diagnoses include:

- **Sprain;**
- **Tendonitis;**
- **Arthritis;**
- **Fracture;**
- **Cyst; and**
- **Carpal tunnel syndrome.**

Typically, a specific activity and sharp pain will immediately precede diagnosis of a sprain whereas inflammation is more likely the case when a patient presents pain and discomfort that relates to wrist function.

As with most conditions, treatment depends on the cause of the pain. A physical therapist may recommend that a patient simply rest the injury for a period of time—sometimes up to six months—which allows the wrist to heal. When appropriate, splints may be used for positioning at rest (for example, when the patient is sleeping) or to ensure correct control of the wrist for protection during activities that cause a patient pain. Use of a splint maintains proper form and reduces discomfort. Other treatments that may be recommended include:

- **Ice or heat packs;**
- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; and**
- **Avoidance of irritating activities.**

An accurate diagnosis must be made to allow for prompt and successful treatment of wrist pain. Physical therapists are well trained to support rehabilitation of wrist injuries, allowing the patient to strengthen the afflicted area and regain full movement and function.