

## Coping with Tenosynovitis

Having heard so many moans about IT, read about IT, suffered from IT and (hopefully) beaten IT, I thought that I might pass on my experience in a simple manner. I hope it helps.

When I started canoeing I heard about tennis-something. It was to be avoided, but everyone knew somebody who had it! It was a creaky, sore wrist and death to paddling aspirations. After a while symptoms uncomfortably familiar began to appear. I persevered - so did the symptoms. I changed to unfeathered blades - great for rivers and following or beam winds - murder in a headwind. Eventually sense intervened and I decided to get proper help - but what kind?

### **I questioned three things:**

- **ME THE MACHINE:** did I need repairs?
- **MY TECHNIQUES:** was I paddling efficiently?
- **MY EQUIPMENT:** was it right for the job?

My physiotherapist, Mrs Simmie, checked my wrist. Yes it was suffering but the problem really started with a mountaineering accident when the bones 'popped apart' after a fall. Nevertheless, treatment was needed. I was given that, plus instructions not to use my wrist at all! Absolutely no paddling! Months later I was allowed gentle paddling until I tried it out and got some strength back Results? It felt much better; a few twinges but worth the months of sulking. My pal John had tenosynovitis with very similar symptoms, treatment and results, so we constantly compared notes.

Gordon Brown, my coach, then undertook to improve my technique and correct faults. A proper upright posture, small of the back supported; reach forward to place the blade with some trunk rotation; pull the shaft back - I was habitually pushing. Bingo! This key shut in emphasis made a big change. Now, instead of having to grip tairly tightly to hold my wrist straight, it straightened of its own accord. And, because I was pulling the bones apart as opposed to pushing them together, the pressure on the joints and subsequent grating virtually vanished. (Grab your own thumb now. Push then pull to see what I mean). It was so obvious, but as I had been taught to push, I never questioned it!

He also advised a shorter paddle shaft. Again, I had equated length with lower paddling rates and greater efficiency. True, but it also meant greater stress as more power was required for each of the strokes. This led me to go to Alistair and Marianne Wilson at Lendal to discuss paddles. In due course we decided on a mid weight carbon shaft with some 'give' in it - very strong but without the shock as the blade stalls in the water. It is 8cm shorter than the last one and it has a variable leather joint. I was able to experiment with feather to reduce windage and minimise wrist twist on my control side (the one with the problem).

The combination of the pull v. `s push action and the modified crank was great! The modified crank virtually means that you don't need a control hand - the blades set themselves as they start to bite. (I have had to convince some modified crank paddlers of this as they were so used to their control hand).

The grip is much more relaxed as the shaft does not have to be held tightly. The crank leads' the blade which has to follow (as it is behind the pulling force) and up and down as well as side to side whilst movement is reduced.

I had used modified crank paddles before and thought that the cranks were too wide for sea paddling. Lendal supplied a width tailor made for me and that made a worthwhile contribution also. So? Well, now I paddle with the big boys again. I'm not fast (never was anyway) but my fear of having to give up paddling is gone.

I think that the questions I asked were the right ones. Certainly, the advice given was good though the 'no paddling' regime was a bit hard. The effort in getting the equipment right was well rewarded (including an interesting tour of Lendals' production unit).

I have avoided long, detailed descriptions of technique, equipment etc. The basic three questions remain the same but the real benefits come from finding the answers to **your** specific problem. I hope your sources turn out to be as good as mine!

**Many thanks to:**

Mrs Simmie  
Gordon Brown  
Alistair and Marianne Wilson.

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