

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## BlackBerry Thumb

Together with several other repetitive stress injuries that are showing up in this fast-paced, technology-focused era is a condition known in popular culture as BlackBerry® thumb. BlackBerry thumb is the joint and wrist pain and inflammation caused by the overuse of any personal digital assistant (PDA) or Smartphone.

Red flags that signal a need to change how we use PDAs, and possibly the need to consult with a qualified health care professional, are occasional aches in any or all of those areas.

Left untreated, BlackBerry thumb can develop into severe pain, weakness, and even disability.

### What Causes It?

BlackBerry thumb occurs as the result of asking the thumb joints to repeatedly perform the same action too often. Excessive tapping, flicking, and clicking do our thumbs no favors. X-ray and exam findings can determine if a patient has BlackBerry thumb.

Some sports enthusiasts like to “work through pain.” They believe that by pushing the body beyond its current limits, it will gradually become accustomed to new demands placed on it. That approach does not work with joints. And since BlackBerry thumb is a joint problem, forcing thumbs to go above and beyond will only lead to further trouble.

### Typical Treatments

Patients will often be asked to rest the thumbs as part of treatment. Medical treatment typically consists of resting or splinting the thumb, anti-inflammatory medicines, cortisone injections and, as a last resort, surgery.

### What Might a DC Suggest?

Doctors of chiropractic (DCs) are educated to use a variety of non-drug, non-surgical



approaches to BlackBerry thumb. Giving your thumbs a chance to start the healing process may include a program of rest, thumb strapping, and gentle stretches or targeted massage. A DC may decide to use Instrument-Assisted Soft-Tissue Mobilization (IASTM) to help alleviate the problem. One of the better-known of such techniques is Graston Technique®, which utilizes stainless steel instruments in the hands of practitioners skilled at treating damaged soft tissues.

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### What Can I Do To Help Myself?

Whatever we might wish them to do, doctors cannot simply make BlackBerry thumb “go away” without the cooperation of the patient. Moderation and flexibility in how we use PDAs



- Cut back on the number of keystrokes and keep messages short and simple.
- Abbreviate.
- Consider using the AutoText feature.
- If a message must be longer, use your computer keyboard, not your PDA.
- Practice using other fingers for typing—especially when thumbs hurt.
- If thumbs are in pain, use a thumb or wrist support.
- Pay attention to your grip. Keep wrists upright and straight.
- Don't slouch while texting. Slouchers often develop neck pain, in addition to thumb pain.

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are key. When it comes to BlackBerry thumb, the following tips can make our PDAs do what they were designed to do—serve us, not hurt us:

- Avoid typing for more than three minutes without a break.
- Hold the PDA comfortably and close to the body.
- Insert it into a holder and set it on a desk or a briefcase.
- Turn the device off on the weekend—or at least on Sundays.
- Decide that you will check emails and text messages just four times a day.



For more information on injury prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the patient information section on ACA's Web site at [www.acatoday.org/Patients](http://www.acatoday.org/Patients) or call 800-986-4636.