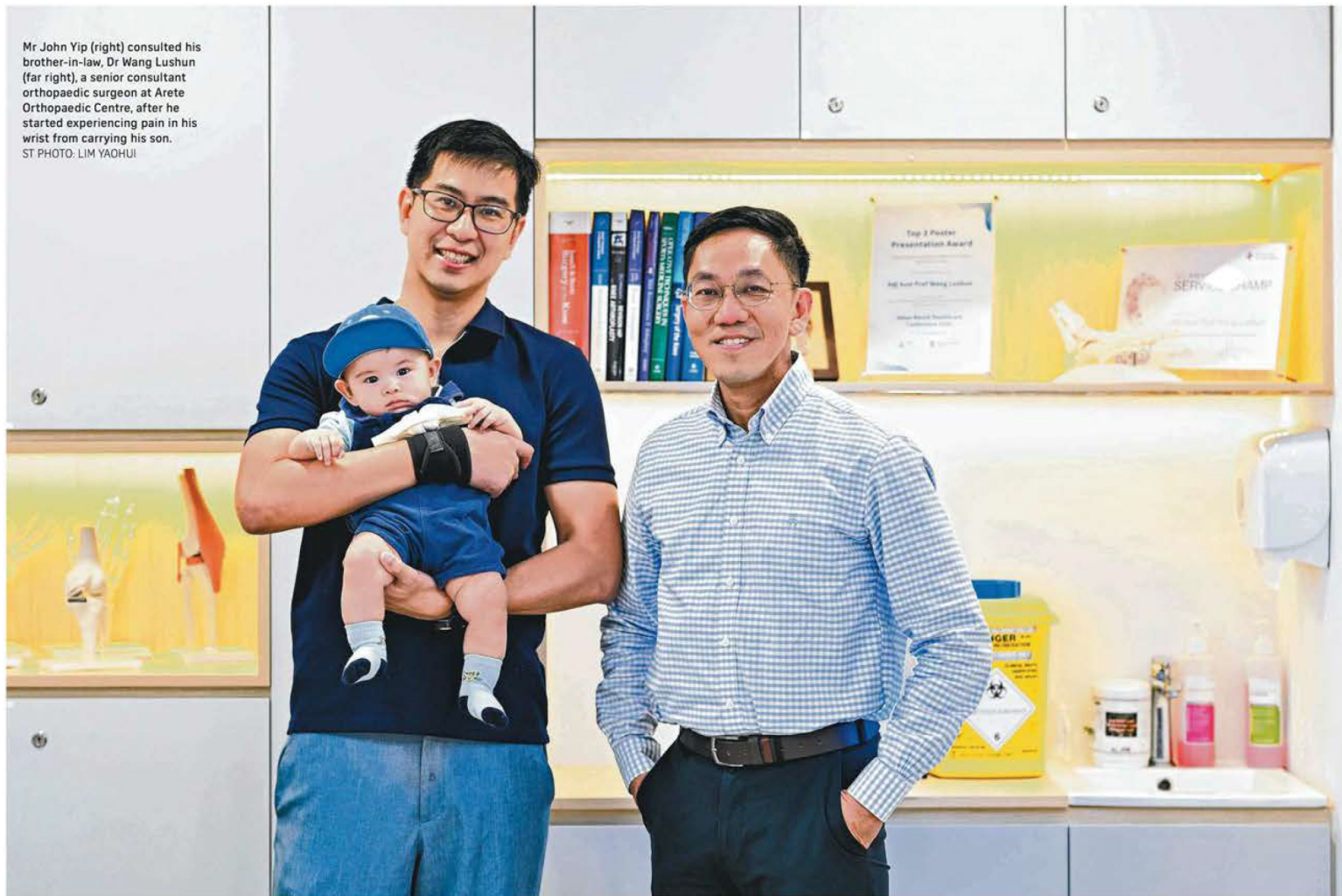


More dads developing 'mummy's wrist'

De Quervain's tenosynovitis, a condition that can arise from caring for babies, causes pain and swelling in the wrist

Mr John Yip (right) consulted his brother-in-law, Dr Wang Lushun (far right), a senior consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Arete Orthopaedic Centre, after he started experiencing pain in his wrist from carrying his son. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



Amrita Kaur

In October 2024, Mr Samuel Wong started experiencing pain in his right wrist while caring for his 10-month-old son, Lucas.

What began as mild discomfort quickly escalated into intense pain that made everyday tasks like twisting a doorknob, shampooing his hair and carrying his baby difficult.

"Supporting my baby's head with my right hand and carrying his body with my left hand caused a lot of pain in my wrist," says the 36-year-old corporate communications manager.

He is married to a 34-year-old media professional and they also have a three-year-old daughter.

A general practitioner told Mr Wong that the tendon in his wrist was inflamed. He was referred to an occupational therapist at National University Hospital, who

told him he may have De Quervain's tenosynovitis.

It is a condition that causes pain and swelling on the thumb side of the wrist. It occurs when the tendons around the base of the thumb become irritated or inflamed, usually due to repetitive movements or overuse.

This can make it difficult to grip, pinch or move the wrist and thumb without discomfort. The condition is often associated with activities that involve repetitive hand motions, such as lifting a baby, typing and gardening.

"At night, when you're rushing to grab your crying baby and prepare a bottle of milk, the position of your wrist is the last thing on your mind. Those awkward angles likely made it worse," says Mr Wong.

Lucas, who is now 13 months old, weighs 9.7kg.

Mr Wong says of the pain: "I saw it as a badge of honour. My wife joked that she didn't have this issue, but I took pride in being hands-on as a father."

He is among a growing number of men in Singapore developing De Quervain's tenosynovitis as a result of caring for their babies.

Dr Wang Lushun, senior consult-

ant orthopaedic surgeon at Arete Orthopaedic Centre, says the condition is common in people aged 30 to 50, and is three to four times more common in women than men.

This has led to it being commonly known as "mummy's wrist" or "mummy's thumb".

FROM 'MUMMY'S WRIST' TO 'DADDY'S WRIST'

However, with the evolving roles of parents, doctors are observing more cases in men.

Dr Wang says the condition has recently been informally referred to as "daddy's wrist", for new fathers caring for their newborn or infant.

Dr Lim Jin Xi, head and senior consultant at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital's division of hand and reconstructive microsurgery, says: "I have observed a shift from seeing almost no cases in fathers a decade ago to an average of five to eight cases annually. This trend seems to mirror the growing involvement of fathers in hands-on caregiving."

Fathers often develop the condition while cradling, lifting or sup-

porting their baby with their thumb extended and wrist bent. This is a position that stresses the tendons, says Dr Lim.

Gripping feeding bottles or holding babies for prolonged periods places repetitive stress on the tendons of the wrist. Awkward or uncomfortable hand positions can increase the strain on the wrist, causing it to be inflamed, she adds.

Dr Tong Pei Yein, a consultant at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's department of orthopaedic surgery, has seen two fathers and a grandfather with the condition in the last six months.

"This is more compared with previous years, when we didn't encounter any cases among men at

Fathers often develop the condition while cradling, lifting or supporting their baby with their thumb extended and wrist bent.

all," she says.

Dr Wang has also seen a slight uptick in fathers with the condition in recent years, compared with a decade ago.

LATE FATHERHOOD MAY INCREASE RISK OF CONDITION

He anticipates that more fathers may experience the condition due to greater involvement in caregiving, supported by the introduction of longer paternal leave, as well as the trend of late fatherhood.

"As men become fathers later in life, they may be more susceptible to age-related degenerative conditions which can contribute to the development of De Quervain's tenosynovitis," says Dr Wang.

Besides increased caregiving responsibility, a greater willingness to seek help for the condition could have led to the rise in prevalence, notes Dr Tong.

Fathers with the syndrome typically have aches and pain in the wrist, especially with movements like bending of the thumb, such as when picking up a baby or opening bottles, she notes.

CONTINUED on C2

Take preventive measures to avoid condition

year-old content creator.

He started experiencing aches in his right wrist two months after Jacob's birth in October, but did not think much of it at the time. However, things got worse in December, when he held Jacob with one hand while using the other to flick open a stroller.

That motion, one he had been doing repeatedly, triggered a sharp pain in his wrist.

He consulted his brother-in-law, Dr Wang, who told him he had De Quervain's tenosynovitis.

Looking back, Mr Yip says he also made the mistake of bouncing or moving around to get Jacob to sleep early on. "I think that was a misstep, as now he requires this specific bouncing motion to fall asleep," he adds.

Now, he occasionally feels pain or a dull ache in his wrist when he carries his son or heavy items like the stroller, which weighs about 11kg.

BEING MINDFUL OF WRIST POSITION AND WEARING A BRACE HELPS

To avoid developing the condition while caring for their baby, fathers can take preventive measures such as paying attention to the position of their wrist.

This includes lowering their body or arm to the level of the baby while keeping the wrist in a neutral posture to pick the baby up, rather than bending and stretching the wrist, says Dr Tong.

Resting and gently massaging the wrist at the early onset of symptoms such as pain and aches, as well as wearing a wrist brace or splint, could allow tendons to repair and heal, preventing further aggravation, she adds.

Patients with the condition may also be prescribed anti-inflammatory medication or pain relief creams, gels, or patches applied to the skin.

FROM C1

Dr Lim says the pain and reduced grip strength can interfere with essential caregiving tasks such as feeding, changing diapers, and lifting the child.

It can also impact daily activities like typing, cooking and leisure sports.

Mr Wong, for instance, feels pain in his wrist when lifting items like his laptop bag or pulling out a dish from the oven.

Mr John Yip, 44, developed De Quervain's tenosynovitis after repeatedly holding his four-month-old son in a particular way.

Jacob, who weighs around 8kg, prefers being held upright, with Mr Yip's hand cradling his thigh or bottom, and the other hand placed under the armpit for extra support.

"When the strain starts building up, you push through and keep holding the same way because changing your grip or position can wake the baby, and that's the last thing you want," says Mr Yip, a freelance consultant in the finance industry. He is married to a 32-

Dr Lim says occupational therapy and physiotherapy - which include stretching and strengthening the tendons in the wrist, as well as improving the positioning of the hand and wrist - can help prevent the condition from recurring.

In less common cases, where symptoms persist or worsen, Dr Wang says corticosteroid injections to reduce pain and swelling, or day surgery with local anaesthesia to relieve the constricted tendons, may be necessary.

In Mr Yip's case, Dr Wang recommended that he wear a wrist brace, which has helped support his wrist comfortably and effectively during daily activities. He has also changed certain habits.

"Flicking open a stroller with one hand while holding a baby in the other wasn't the smartest thing to do. One change I've made is to take the stroller out first, set it up properly and then move the baby out of the car seat," he says.

Besides carrying Jacob less often, Mr Yip also makes a conscious effort to do everything more slowly and avoid any sudden actions.

He sometimes uses a hip baby carrier to help distribute Jacob's weight and ease the strain while holding him.

Mr Wong's occupational therapist taught him hand-stretching exercises and told him to take frequent breaks during activities like carrying his baby and mopping.

Besides wearing a wrist brace to help stabilise his wrist and reduce strain, Mr Wong was also taught proper techniques to reduce strain, such as avoiding awkward wrist angles and using a scooping motion to pick up his baby.

"These small adjustments make a big difference," he says.

"I wear a wrist guard, especially when driving. Recovery has been slow, and I'm not fully healed yet."

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