NONSURGICAL ORTHOPEDICS — KEY WEST CONCIERGE ORTHOPEDICS

Sports Medicine View of Grand Theft Auto, GTA: What Matters Most?

Hand or wrist pain while playing Grand Theft Auto usually points to a repeated use problem, not a problem caused by the game itself. The main orthopedic concern with longer sessions is repeated hand movement with limited recovery, especially when gripping, button presses, and thumb motion keep setting off the same sore area.

Jason Pirozzolo, DO, a sports medicine physician, looks past the game title and focuses on the pattern of symptoms. "Relax your grip and keep your wrists aligned with your forearms." Dr. Pirozzolo's view is that the useful question is which structure is irritated, because treatment depends on whether the source is a tendon, a nerve, a joint, or a finger that locks.

It is not always just "gamer's thumb"

Hand pain during gaming is often called gamer's thumb, a plain term for pain linked to repeated thumb use. One possible diagnosis is de Quervain tenosynovitis, meaning irritation and thickening around tendons on the thumb side of the wrist. In that problem, pain can increase with gripping, twisting, or moving the thumb.

Other conditions can look similar. Trigger finger causes painful clicking, catching, or locking as a finger bends or straightens, while carpal tunnel syndrome is pressure on the median nerve at the wrist and often causes tingling or numbness in the thumb and nearby fingers. Arthritis in the fingers, thumb base, or wrist can also become more noticeable during long play, with aching, stiffness, swelling, and pain during gripping. Other conditions can produce similar symptoms, so the location and examination matter.

Who usually asks about this

The people who ask are usually trying to keep playing without making symptoms worse, or they want to know whether gaming is causing lasting damage. Grand Theft Auto VI launched on November 19, 2026, for PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X|S, according to Rockstar Games, and Newzoo reported in 2026 that 3.7 billion people worldwide will play video games this year.

That scale explains why the question comes up so often, but it does not change the medical answer. In a 2019 BMJ Open Sport and Exercise Medicine survey of 65 collegiate esports players, 36% reported wrist pain and 32% reported hand pain. "Shorten sessions when symptoms appear, and allow recovery before increasing play time." These were self-reported symptoms among competitive gamers, not confirmed injury rates in the general population.

The questions worth asking before you try to play through it

Start with what the pain is for, meaning what structure is most likely involved. A focused examination can help tell whether the problem involves a tendon, a joint, or a nerve, and X-rays or ultrasound may help when needed. Imaging is not necessary for every condition.

Then ask where the problem may be coming from, what is known so far, what treatment options fit the diagnosis, what each option costs, and what else can do the same job. Treatment may include activity changes, a properly chosen splint, hand therapy, medication when appropriate, or a targeted corticosteroid injection, and many of these problems can improve without surgery. "At the appointment, describe which movements provoke symptoms, exactly where you feel pain, and whether numbness or locking occurs." Bring information about previous hand injuries and other relevant medical conditions.

Dr. Pirozzolo's bottom line is that the game matters less than the pattern of pain and the motion that sets it off. "Seek an accurate diagnosis and a practical treatment plan before recurring symptoms begin limiting work, exercise, or everyday hand function." A useful next step is to note how long you play, which movements bring on symptoms, and whether they also affect sleep or driving.

If pain returns whenever you play, interferes with sleep, or persists despite reducing activity, contact Key West Concierge Orthopedics.

Questions About Gaming-Related Hand and Wrist Pain

Can gaming alone tell you what injury you have?

No. Similar pain can come from tendon irritation, trigger finger, carpal tunnel syndrome, or arthritis, so the exact location and pattern matter.

Does wrist or thumb pain mean you need imaging?

Not always. A focused examination often sorts out the likely source first, and imaging is used when it adds something useful.

When should you stop trying to manage it on your own?

Get it checked if pain returns whenever you play, affects sleep, or does not improve after you cut back. Finger locking, swelling, or altered sensation also deserve an evaluation.

Sources

- Wang R. Advice From a Hand Therapist: Video Gaming Without Pain. American Society for Surgery of the Hand. May 29, 2019
- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. De Quervain's Tenosynovitis. OrthoInfo. Accessed November 19, 2026
- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Trigger Finger. OrthoInfo. Accessed November 19, 2026
- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. OrthoInfo.

Accessed November 19, 2026

- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Arthritis of the Hand. OrthoInfo. Accessed November 19, 2026
- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Arthritis of the Wrist. OrthoInfo. Accessed November 19, 2026
- Rockstar Games. Grand Theft Auto VI. Official game website. Accessed November 19, 2026
- Newzoo. Global games market key numbers. Global Games Market Report 2026. Updated November 4, 2026
- DiFrancisco-Donoghue J et al. Managing the health of the eSport athlete: an integrated health management model. BMJ Open Sport Exerc Med. 2019.

Medically reviewed by

Jason Pirozzolo, DO

Fellowship Trained and Board Certified in Sports Medicine

Last medically reviewed: November 19, 2026