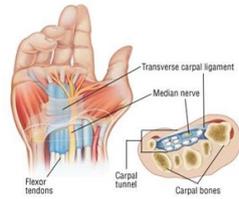




Carpal Tunnel



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Carpal Tunnel Syndrome Patient Information

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition in which a nerve is squeezed where it passes through the wrist. This nerve, called the median nerve, controls muscles that move your thumb; it also carries information back to the brain about sensations in your thumb and fingers. Treatment is usually successful and, if it's treated early, very few people are left with long-term hand problems.

What is it?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) is a condition caused by the median nerve being compressed as it passes through the carpal tunnel in the wrist. The carpal tunnel is narrow and is formed by the wrist bones and a thick ligament, as shown in the picture

Who gets it?

The median nerve is very sensitive to pressure, and it may not be possible to say what the cause is in your particular case.

- CTS affects more women than men
- It is most common in those aged between 40 and 65.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

Most commonly the cause of carpal tunnel syndrome is unknown. Known causes and contributory factors include:

Any condition that reduces the amount of space within the carpal tunnel can cause CTS. Examples of these can include (but are not limited to):

- Any form of arthritis in the wrist if there is swelling of the wrist joint or the tendons that run through the carpal tunnel
 - Obesity
 - hormonal changes such as during pregnancy
 - An underactive thyroid gland
 - Diabetes
 - Some fractures or dislocation of the wrist
 - Occasionally, some medications can cause it
 - excessive alcohol consumption (more than 14 units a week)
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Your carpal tunnel maybe aggravated

If you do work or hobbies that involve repeatedly or repetitive bending of your wrist or gripping hard.

What are the symptoms?

- o Tingling of the thumb and fingers (not the little finger)
- o Numbness in the thumb and fingers (not the little finger)
- o Burning pain from the wrist to the fingers
- o Change in touch or temperature sensation
- o Clumsiness in the hands people may report having difficulty performing fine tasks such as doing up buttons
- o Weakness of grip, ability to pinch and other thumb actions
- o Symptoms are commonly said to be worse at night or first thing in the morning.
- o In the early stages, there me be cramping into the hand and numbness and tingling that may come and go
- o If the condition worsens, the altered feeling may become continuous alongside weakness and wasting of muscles at the base of the thumb.
- o Sometimes people report that shaking their hand helps to relieve symptoms

Tests

In some circumstances you may be referred for nerve conduction tests to assist with diagnosis

What treatments are there for carpal tunnel syndrome?

Many different treatments have been suggested for carpal tunnel syndrome but only a few have been proven to work. Not all cases are progressive and some may improve without any medical treatment.

Importantly, if there's a particular cause for your problem (for example underactive thyroid gland, arthritis) then your symptoms may improve simply by treating that. Your doctor will advise you which treatments are available, and they'll help to decide which is most appropriate for you. There are many treatments available but not all treatments are suitable for everyone as everyone is different. The decision is usually affected by how severe the compression of the nerve is. If it's severe and there's weakness of your hand muscles, then it's important to get treatment quickly, and may be advised to have surgery. If your symptoms are mild or intermittent conservative treatments can often be helpful.

What can be done to help reduce symptoms?

There are a few conservative strategies that can help you reduce or prevent the symptoms of CTS in the early stages.

- 1.) **Maintaining a healthy weight**
- 2.) **Activity modification**
- 3.) **Splinting.**

1.) **Maintaining a healthyweight**,with a healthy diet and regular exercise you are putting less pressure on the carpal tunnel. You can check if you have a healthy BMI here; <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>

1.) Activity Modification, Changing the way you use your hands and complete activities

Certain activities can increase the severity of symptoms. Ways to reduce the impact of these activities include:

Reducing duration, frequency and/or force required to complete tasks. For example:

- Take regular breaks when possible during heavier or repetitive tasks/ tasks that increase your symptoms
- Consider other ways that a task can be completed. EG. Push heavy objects across a table or bench rather than carrying it, ask your butcher to cut up your meat for you, etc.
- Alternate heavier tasks with lighter tasks

Avoid positioning your wrist in extremes of movement

- Particularly if pinching or gripping at the same time
- There is more room in the carpal tunnel when the wrist is straight
- Symptoms tend to be less severe when your wrist is straight

Avoid prolonged or repetitive pinching or gripping. For example:

- Loosen your grip and change your position regularly eg. when reading a book, talking on the phone, pushing a shopping trolley or sweeping/mopping
- Use equipment/tools/cutlery/pens with thicker handles as this requires less force to hold
- Take regular breaks during activities that do increase symptoms if unable to change the way

Modifying your environment. For example:

- Review your computer station set up .Might find standing mouse or gel pad support for wrist helpful
- Consider using soft gloves/mitt, or softer conforming handles, to reduce vibration during activities such as using a lawn mower or
- Can someone or something help you? Eg. a jar opener, easier to use pegs, lowering the clothes line, easy open gardening shears



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Splinting

You can obtain a wrist splint from a local pharmacy, or the internet. It is advised to wear the splint at night time only.

Wearing wrist splints while you are sleeping may reduce the severity of symptoms.

Splints help to reduce symptoms by positioning the wrist to reduce pressure within the carpal tunnel. The carpal tunnel is most open when the wrist is straight. Please note that after you start using the splints, it may take several weeks before you start to notice an improvement in your symptoms.

Steroid injection

A steroid injection will only be helpful in some cases, although the effect is temporary; results will vary with effects reported as lasting from weeks to months. Not everyone is suitable or wants an injection and for many patients surgery is the treatment offered

Surgery

You may need surgery if there's more severe compression of your median nerve or if the numbness and pain don't improve with other treatments. The surgery, known as carpal tunnel release or decompression surgery, it relieves the symptoms by reducing the pressure on your median nerve. Your hand surgeon will advise if this is the best course of action

For further information

Please email ghnt.newcastlegatesheadtims@nhs.net, ring on **0191 2138800** or visit our website at: www.tims.nhs.uk which provides online guidance and support on managing your musculoskeletal (MSK) condition effectively.

The NHS website also provides trusted online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare to help you manage your condition and/or inform your choices about your health: www.nhs.uk.

Useful links

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone **0800 032 02 02** or e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk.



Tyneside Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

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