



Carpal Tunnel

Do you think you have carpal tunnel syndrome? The Carpal Tunnel is a narrow space between the wrist and hand that is surrounded on three sides by bones and the top side by a ligament. You could say that there is a lot of 'traffic' going through this tunnel, including 9 tendons from your arm to your hand and the median nerve. The nerve is on top and easily hurt. You may feel pain shooting up and down the hand and arm; pain in the hand may wake you up at night or you may have numbness or tingling in the thumb, index finger, middle finger, and part of the ring finger.



Anything that decreases the space in the carpal tunnel can cause symptoms -swelling, caused by pregnancy or arthritis -tendonitis from overusing your hand -holding your wrist bent down or back with work or recreational activities -direct pressure on the carpal tunnel from a tool you are holding or the edge of the table

If you do have carpal tunnel related pain, numbness, or tingling, the following suggestions may help you manage this pain.

-Get rid of any swelling in your hands -put your arms up over your head and gently move your fingers -apply an ice pack or alternate between warm and cool water soaks -ask your doctor if there are any

medicines to help with swelling -Rest your hands; if you have tendonitis, the swelling of the tendons in the carpal tunnel can put pressure on the nerve -massage and stretch out the painful areas -take frequent stretch breaks at work, with housework or with hobbies -wear a wrist support with the heavy or highly repetitive jobs that may hurt your wrist

- Tight grip or pinch can also hurt your tendons
- rest your book on a table, book rest or pillow rather than holding it
- pad your pen and take rest breaks when doing crafts
- Using tools with handles that are too small can cause undue stress on your muscles and tendons
- pad tool handles or use tools with larger, softer handles

Certain wrist positions increase pressure on the median nerve in the carpal tunnel:

- holding the wrist bent downward can increase the pressure in the tunnel
- the position of the wrist is determined by the location of your work surface
- the ideal work height is 2” below your elbow whether you are sitting or standing
- do not bend your wrist down when sleeping
- When you hold a tool, such as a knife, scissors or pliers, the tool can put pressure directly on the nerve at the base of the palm
- pad tool handles; pipe insulation is an inexpensive padding for most tools
- pad your steering wheel if your hand go numb when driving and buy softer handled “ergonomic” tools
- avoid resting your wrist on the edge of a table

The non-surgical treatment for carpal tunnel syndrome includes wearing a splint at night, using a straight wrist position whenever possible, and consider a referral to a Certified Hand Therapist if your symptoms persist

Courtesy of M. Talacko OTR/L, CHT (2013)