



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A nerve disorder that causes pain, loss of feeling, and loss of strength in the hands. It usually affects the thumb and first three fingers. In some cases, it may affect the 4th and 5th fingers only.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Tingling or numbness in part of the hand.
- Sharp pains that shoot from the wrist up the arm, especially at night.
- Burning sensations in the fingers.
- Morning stiffness or cramping of hands.
- Thumb weakness.
- Inability to make a fist.

### CAUSES

It appears to result from either repetitive hand and wrist movement (repeating the same motion over and over) or an injury. The tendons or ligaments of the wrist become stretched and swollen. This puts pressure on the nerve that goes into the hand and fingers.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Work that requires repetitive hand or wrist action. This includes factory assembly or packaging work, cashiering, janitors, or cleaning jobs, dental hygienists, butchers and meat cutters, or using a computer mouse.
- Certain medical or physical conditions may increase the risk. These include arthritis, diabetes, untreated hypothyroidism, obesity, menopause, and pregnancy.
- Sports activities, such as racquetball or handball.
- People who smoke, use alcohol, or have high levels of stress may be more at risk.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Take a break at least once an hour if doing repetitive work involving the hands. Stand up, stretch, and/or walk around.
- Learn to use a computer mouse safely. Don't squeeze or grip it too tightly. Use your arm to move it around, not just your wrist in a side-to-side movement.
- Don't wear tight watch bands or bracelets, or clothing that fits tightly at the wrists.
- Ask your health care provider if wrist splints will help you in the work that you do.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms usually improve with treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

If untreated or treated too late, permanent numbness and a weak thumb or fingers in the affected hand may occur.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will examine your hand and wrist and ask questions about your symptoms. Medical tests may be done to study nerve conduction.
- Conservative treatment is usually tried first.
- If you awaken at night with pain in your hand, hang it over the side of the bed, rub it, or shake it.
- Use ice or warm and cold soaks if they help with symptoms.
- Wearing a splint on the affected wrist may be recommended.
- For work at a computer terminal, be sure that the desk, keyboard, and chair are at the proper height. Take a break once an hour.
- Surgery to free the pinched nerve may be needed. The procedure may be done as an outpatient. Allow 2 weeks for healing. Physical therapy will then help rebuild wrist strength.

### MEDICATIONS

- You may take aspirin or ibuprofen to reduce pain and inflammation.
- Anti-inflammatory drugs, cortisone injections at the wrist to reduce inflammation, and vitamin B6 injections or tablets may be prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

Once symptoms get better, begin a routine of both aerobic and weight-training exercise to improve fitness.

### DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome don't lessen in 2 weeks after treatment.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

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Special notes:

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