

Self Help for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Information for patients

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is pressure on a nerve in the wrist (The Median Nerve). Causes of pressure may include swelling, thickened soft tissues or bony changes.

Contributing factors

- Pregnancy
- Overweight
- Work or hobbies that mean you repeatedly bend your wrist or grip hard
- Arthritis or other medical conditions
- Previous broken wrist

When to seek medical attention

- A new lump or bump around the wrist
- Bruising or redness in and around the joint or new multiple joint swellings
- Feeling unwell with a temperature associated with the onset of this problem
- Loss of feeling, power or muscle wasting in the hand
- Sudden onset of pain after injury

Symptoms

Common symptoms include an ache or pain in your fingers, hand or arm. You may experience numbness, tingling or weakness of the thumb and difficulty gripping.

What to expect

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome will often settle within a few weeks or months with the changes in activity. **If your symptoms persist, then the first line of treatment is physiotherapy, where you will be assessed and given specific instructions and exercises to help your condition.** A small number of people may require more invasive treatment, such as an injection or surgery if their symptoms do not respond to the other treatments.

Management

- Avoid actions that may aggravate symptoms, such as forceful gripping
- Try a wrist splint at night, to keep your wrist straight and relieve pressure on the nerve. If the splint has a metal bar, it this would need to be shaped to your wrist. Splints should be available from your chemist

- If you are involved in an activity using repetitive movements, such as a keyboard or mouse work, or if your profession requires repetitive manual handling activities, have a look at your workstation and work activities and consider how you could adjust these to avoid undue stress on your wrist. You may need to talk to your employer
- Adequately control your pain, as pain can stop the muscles working properly and can make this condition last longer. Speak to your pharmacist if you are unsure which medication may help
- You could apply heat or ice to help with the pain and healing. Ensure that you do not apply these directly to the skin. Also do not use them too frequently or for prolonged periods of time (up to 20 minutes), as these treatments can burn the skin
- Try to maintain a good posture
- Occupational therapy assessment and input may be requested by your physiotherapist or GP

Exercises

Diagram	Explanation
<div data-bbox="220 835 699 1339" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="363 1373 552 1406" style="text-align: center;">Start position</p> <div data-bbox="209 1496 699 2027" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="368 2067 547 2101" style="text-align: center;">End position</p>	<p data-bbox="831 936 1469 1003">Sit or stand with good posture of neck, upper back and shoulder.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1043 1497 1077">Maintain relaxed breathing during the exercise.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1120 1453 1187">Adopt the start position demonstrated in the photograph.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1229 1497 1296">Place your elbow slightly away from your body, in a bent position and your wrist straight.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1630 1497 1776">Providing this position is relatively comfortable and does not worsen your symptoms, slowly bend your wrist backwards as demonstrated in the end position photograph.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1818 1445 1886">Hold this position for five seconds and then return to the start position for five seconds.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1928 1469 1995">Repeat this 15-30 times, two to three times a day as tolerated.</p>



Sit with your hand supported on a table and your palm facing upwards. Use your unaffected arm to assist with gently stretching your thumb back towards the table, as demonstrated in the photograph.

Hold for five seconds. Repeat 10 times. Two to three times a day as tolerated.

Do not force or over stretch.

Do not continue if your symptoms are aggravated by this exercise.

Frequently asked questions

When can I return to sport?

You may return to sport when you can perform the range of movements and strength required for your sport.

What can I do if my symptoms do not settle?

If your symptoms have not settled after four to six weeks, you should consider referring yourself to your local physiotherapy department. Physiotherapy self-referral forms are available at your GP reception. Complete the form and return to the reception desk. You will either receive a telephone call or a letter for you to arrange an appointment with the physiotherapist.

This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

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