



# Carpal Tunnel Syndrome



## A COMMON DISORDER

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common disorder. Though it affects men and women almost equally overall, it occurs with higher frequency in individuals with thyroid disorders and diabetes. Many pregnant women also develop carpal tunnel syndrome, especially during the middle and later stages of pregnancy.



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## What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway in the wrist surrounded by bones and ligaments. This space contains multiple tendons and the median nerve, a major nerve that carries messages between the hand and the brain. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when tendons within the carpal tunnel become inflamed and compress the median nerve. This may cause tingling, numbness and other symptoms.

## Symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome

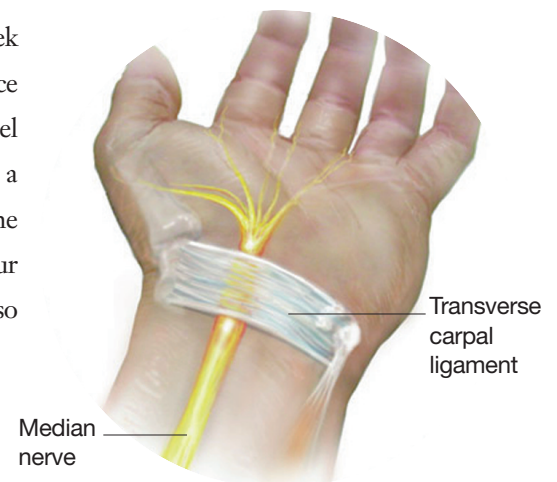
If you have carpal tunnel syndrome, the most common symptom you are likely to experience is intermittent numbness in your hand. Because the numbness is most pronounced in your index and long fingers, you may find it difficult to grasp objects. If the numbness occurs at night, it may awaken you from sleep.

Carpal tunnel syndrome also can produce pain that begins in your wrist and spreads into your arm. Rubbing or shaking your hand brings only temporary relief.

## Seeking treatment

Though carpal tunnel syndrome will occasionally resolve without medical intervention, you may find that the pain and numbness become worse over time. Without treatment, carpal tunnel syndrome can even lead to permanent damage of the median nerve.

For this reason, it is advisable to seek treatment when you begin to experience symptoms. To diagnose carpal tunnel syndrome, your physician will conduct a nerve test and physical examination of the affected area and ask you about your symptoms. An X-ray of the wrist may also be required.





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If your physician determines that you have carpal tunnel syndrome, he or she will recommend a treatment plan designed to reduce compression on the nerve, which can help to relieve your symptoms. In most cases, treatment will involve the use of a splint worn at night to stabilize the wrist and control swelling. Anti-inflammatory medications also may be recommended.

In most people, carpal tunnel syndrome can be successfully treated without surgery. For some patients, however, splinting and the use of medications are not effective in controlling symptoms. In these cases, a surgical procedure called carpal tunnel release may be necessary.

### **Carpal tunnel release**

During carpal tunnel release, the surgeon will cut the transverse carpal ligament, which forms the roof of the carpal tunnel. This procedure creates more room for the median nerve to pass through the wrist.

Carpal tunnel release surgery can be performed using a traditional open approach or a less invasive technique called endoscopic surgery.

During endoscopic surgery, the physician inserts a miniature video camera (called an endoscope) and operating instruments through two small horizontal incisions in the wrist and palm. The camera allows the physician to watch his or her work on a monitor as he or she releases the ligament.

With open surgery, your surgeon makes one incision in your palm and releases the ligament.

### **Recovery from carpal tunnel syndrome**

Most patients who seek early treatment for this condition find that nonsurgical methods are effective. For those who require surgery, the outlook is also very favorable. In the vast majority of people, surgery provides permanent relief from symptoms. Furthermore, recovery from surgery is quick, with most patients returning to their normal activities within a few weeks.

If you develop carpal tunnel syndrome in one wrist, you have a higher risk of developing the condition in the other wrist as well. If you experience numbness, tingling or weakness in your hands, it is advisable to seek early medical intervention from a physician who is experienced in managing carpal tunnel syndrome.