

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – Patient Information

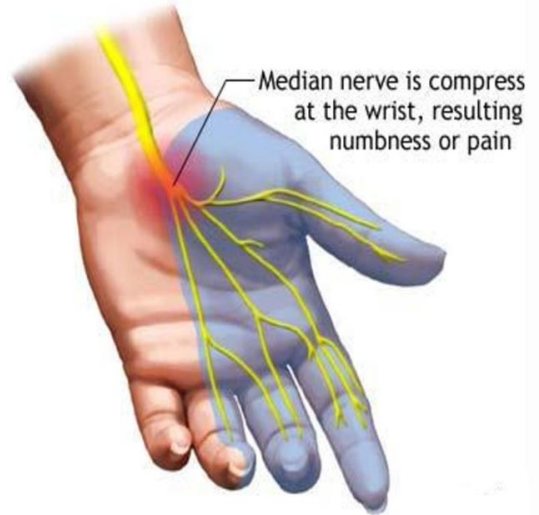
What are the symptoms of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms usually include:

- **Tingling or numbness** in the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers, but not the little finger.
- Sensations that may travel up your arm.
- Symptoms that cause **waking at night** and may be worse first thing in the morning or with grip.
- Many people “**shake-out**” their hand for relief.
- Using small objects can be difficult.

Other symptoms may include:

- Pain in the hand or wrist
- Loss of grip strength
- In more severe cases, loss of muscle bulk around the base of your thumb



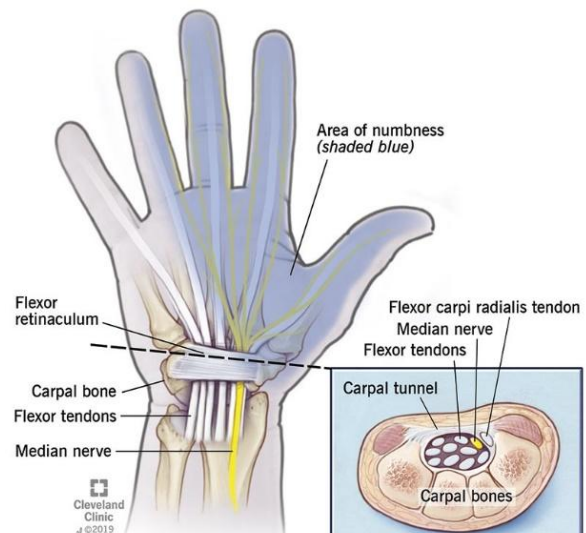
What causes Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is caused by compression or irritation of the median nerve in the carpal tunnel. The carpal tunnel is a narrow passage formed by bones and ligaments at the front of your wrist. The median nerve gives the feeling to your thumb, index, middle and ring fingers. It also operates the muscles around the base of your thumb and index finger side of your hand.

The median nerve can be compressed or irritated inside the carpal tunnel due to:

- Heavy repetitive grasping and pulling, process work, or cold temperatures.
- Sustained positioning of the wrist in a bent or extended position.
- Genetic differences in anatomy of the carpal tunnel.
- Injury to the wrist.

Other health conditions, including diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, and obesity can make you more likely to get Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, especially if these conditions are not well managed. In many cases there is a combination of factors.



<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4005-carpal-tunnel-syndrome>

Pregnancy related swelling can also cause carpal tunnel symptoms. Symptoms generally get better within 3 months after the baby is born. It is still a good idea to get treatment and advice before the 3 months.

To find out more about Carpal Tunnel Syndrome go to:

www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/

What can I do for my Carpal Tunnel Syndrome Symptoms?

- **Reduce your force and relax your grip.** If your work involves a cash register or keyboard, for instance, hit the keys softly. For prolonged gripping or handwriting, change or adapt handles to make tools easier to hold. Use a big pen with an oversized, soft grip adapter and free-flowing ink, or try work gloves, as examples.
- **Take short breaks often.** Gently stretch and bend hands and wrists now and again. Rotate around tasks when possible. This is especially important if you use equipment that vibrates or that requires you to use a great amount of force. Even a few minutes each hour can make a difference.
- **Watch your posture.** Avoid bending your wrist all the way up or down. A relaxed middle position is best. Ideal is your wrist nearly straight and your thumb up. Keep your keyboard or work bench at elbow height or slightly lower.
- **Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.** Draw your shoulder blades gently down to your back pockets. Perform shoulder rolls, forwards and backwards, every hour.
- **Keep your hands warm.** You are more likely to develop hand pain and stiffness if you work in a cold environment. If you cannot control the temperature at work, put on fingerless gloves that keep your hands and wrists warm, or more layers on your body to keep up your core body temperature.
- **Avoid activities that make symptoms worse,** if possible.
- **Try a wrist splint.** This should position your wrist straight. It can be worn at night even if you can't use it during the day. Splints are available from some pharmacies or a physiotherapist or hand therapist. The splint can be adjusted by bending the bar to a wrist straight position.
- **Do not try squeezing a ball** – it will make your Carpal Tunnel symptoms worse!



What can Physiotherapy do for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

- Work with you for your daily functioning.
- Provide or recommend a splint that fits well to keep your wrist positioned straight.
- Advise about stretches or other exercises.

What can my GP do for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

- Check your general health for anything that might be contributing to your carpal tunnel problem, e.g., diabetes, and help to manage these.
- Make a referral to physiotherapy or surgery services, if needed.

What about surgery for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

If your symptoms are severe, or do not improve after 8-12 weeks of splinting and changing your hand use, you might need surgery. Carpal Tunnel surgery is a simple procedure that reduces pressure on the nerve inside the carpal tunnel.

Surgery is usually effective but does have risks, so it is used only for severe cases, or when the problem has not improved with other treatments.