



carpal tunnel syndrome

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

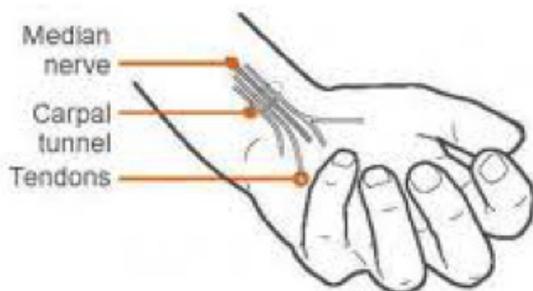
Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition in which the median nerve is squeezed where it passes through the wrist. This often happens because the tendons in the wrist have become swollen and they press on the nerve. The median nerve controls some of the muscles that move the thumb and it carries information back to the brain about sensations in your thumb and fingers.

Symptoms include:

- pins and needles in the thumb, forefinger, middle finger and half of the ring finger nearest the thumb
- pain or aching in the hand or the same fingers as above – the pain sometimes travels up the forearm
- numbness of the same fingers or palm
- a weakened grip – some people find they drop things.

The symptoms vary from mild to severe depending on how compressed the median nerve becomes. The symptoms are usually worse at night, but can also be noticed during daily activities, such as driving.

Sometimes the condition can be mistaken for something else. For example, pressure on nerves in the neck due to disc problems or arthritis can cause similar symptoms. A nerve conduction test may help if there's any doubt about the diagnosis.



The tendons and the median nerve pass through the carpal tunnel in the wrist.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common problem. It's often caused by work-related activities, such as typing, and repetitive movements, although some cases may be related to arthritis of the wrist, thyroid disease and pregnancy. Your risk of developing it may be greater if your job places heavy demands on your wrist or if you use vibrating tools.

What can be done to help?

If there's a particular cause, like an underactive thyroid or arthritis, treating that condition may help. Other treatment will depend on how severe the nerve compression is the pain and tingling.

Splints

Wearing a resting splint can help prevent the symptoms occurring at night, or a working splint can be useful if your symptoms are brought on by particular activities.



Injections

Your doctor or a specialist physiotherapist can give you a steroid injection into your carpal tunnel to reduce inflammation. Your pain should ease within 2 weeks and you should recover over approximately a 4–6 week period.

Surgery

If your symptoms are constant and are not relieved by non-surgical measures, surgery may be needed. Carpal tunnel release surgery involves dividing a ligament in your wrist to relieve pressure on a nerve that controls movement and feeling in your hand.

