

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:

WHAT IS IT?



The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway in your wrist. It lies at the base of your palm, between the small hand bones—called carpal bones—and a broad ligament. Nine tendons pass through this tunnel. These tendons connect to muscles in your forearm and allow your fingers to bend. The median nerve also passes through the carpal tunnel. This nerve connects with the tissues in your palm, thumb, and first 3 fingers. It allows you to feel sensation in this part of your hand and helps move your thumb and fingers.

Carpal tunnel syndrome happens when the median nerve gets compressed or pinched inside the carpal tunnel. Often, this happens when the tendons become swollen and press on the nerve. This pressure causes the pain, tingling, and numbness associated with carpal tunnel syndrome.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is much more common in women than in men. This may be because the tunnel area tends to be smaller in women. A smaller tunnel area may make it more likely that the nerve and tendons that pass through it are affected. Some other factors that make people more likely to get carpal tunnel syndrome are:

- Pregnancy
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disease
- Jobs or hobbies where your hands do the same motions over and over

People with this condition may have a number of signs and symptoms. Symptoms happen only on the “thumb side” of your hand. This

includes the thumb and nearby palm area and your first three fingers. The pinky finger is not involved. Common signs and symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome are:

- **Pain and discomfort:** This may feel tingly, achy, burning, or stabbing. The painful sensations may radiate up your arm. The discomfort may be worse at night if you curl your wrists during sleep. The pain may wake you up.
- **Numbness:** A compressed median nerve can produce numbness on the thumb side of your hand.
- **Weak grip and trouble with fine finger control:** A compressed median nerve can affect control over the small muscles in your hand. This can make it hard to grasp objects or do tasks that require hand coordination.
- **Sensation of swollen fingers:** It may feel as if your fingers are swollen, even though they are not.
- **Flick sign:** You may feel the urge to shake or flick your wrist as a way to try to relieve the pain. This is a common sign of carpal tunnel syndrome.

- **Symptoms that worsen after certain activities:** Activities that require you to grip an object may worsen your symptoms. For instance, you might feel symptoms after holding a phone, steering wheel, newspaper, or book.
- **Permanent loss of sensation and muscle wasting:** In severe, long-term cases, the median nerve may be damaged. This can cause permanent loss of feeling and muscle wasting at the base of the thumb.

The symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome usually start slowly and may come and go at first. Over time, though, they can become constant. If you have symptoms of this syndrome, talk to your health care practitioner as soon as you can. In most cases, treatment can relieve your pain and prevent long-term damage to your hand and wrist.

Ask your health care practitioner if there are any tests, referrals, or treatments that might be helpful to use along with your current treatment plan. Other treatment options may include the following: chiropractic services, physical therapy, acupuncture, massage therapy, medicines, and other services (such as occupational therapy).