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## **CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME**

### **General Information**

#### ***DESCRIPTION***

A nerve disorder in the hand that causes pain and loss of feeling, frequently in the thumb and first three fingers. It involves the median and/or ulnar nerve at the wrist joint and the blood vessels and tendons of the hand.

#### ***FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS***

- Tingling or numbness in part of the hand.
- Sharp pains that shoot from the wrist up the arm, especially at night.
- Burning sensations in the fingers.
- Morning stiffness or cramping of hands.
- Thumb weakness.
- Frequent dropping of objects.
- Inability to make a fist.
- Shiny, dry skin on the hand.

#### ***CAUSES***

Pressure on the nerves at the wrist caused by swollen, inflamed or scarred tissue. The sources of pressure include:

- Inflammation of the tendon sheaths, frequently from arthritis.
- Fracture of the forearm.
- Sprain or dislocation of the wrist.

#### ***RISK INCREASES WITH***

- Diabetes mellitus.
- Hypothyroidism.
- Menopause.
- Raynaud's disease.
- Pregnancy.

- Rheumatoid arthritis and gout.
- Ganglion cyst.
- Work that requires repetitive hand or wrist action.

### ***PREVENTIVE MEASURES***

- Take a break at least once an hour when doing repetitive work involving hands.
- Wear a wrist brace if your work involves doing repetitive work involving hands.

### ***EXPECTED OUTCOMES***

Usually curable, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes with surgery. Surgery usually needed if muscle wasting or nerve changes have developed.

### ***POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS***

- Permanent numbness and a weak thumb or fingers in the affected hand.
- Permanent paralysis of some of the hand and finger muscles.

## **Treatment**

### ***GENERAL MEASURES***

- Diagnostic studies may include electrophysiologic nerve tests (records electrical activity of muscles) and X-rays of the hand and wrist.
- Conservative treatment is usually tried first.
- Discomfort improves by shaking hands or dangling arms. If you awaken at night with pain in your hand, hang it over the side of the bed; rub or shake it.
- Wearing a splint on the affected wrist may be recommended.
- For work at a computer terminal, be sure desk, keyboard and chair are at the proper height. Take a break once an hour.
- Surgery to free the pinched nerve. Provides almost complete relief from all symptoms in 95% of patients. Procedure may be done as an outpatient. Allow 2 weeks for healing.

### ***MEDICATIONS***

- Anti-inflammatory drugs to reduce inflammation.
- Cortisone injections at the wrist to reduce inflammation.
- Vitamin B-6 (pyridoxine) may reduce symptoms; use only if prescribed for your disorder.

### ***ACTIVITY***

Stay as active as your strength allows. If surgery has been necessary, allow time for recovery. Exercises may be prescribed for the hand.

## *DIET*

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet.

### **Notify Our Office If**

- You or a family member has symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome don't lessen in 2 weeks after treatment.

### **Special Instructions:**