

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

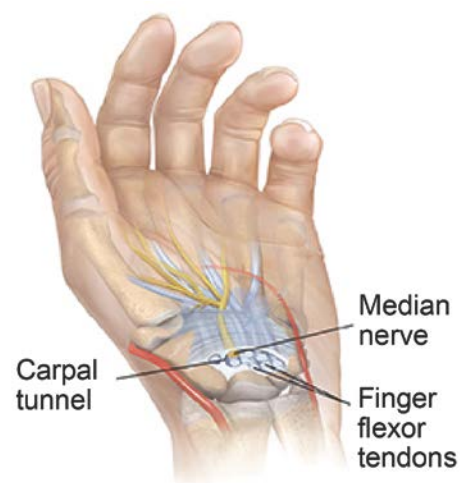
Self-care to lessen symptoms

This handout gives tips to help ease stress on the carpal tunnel area of your hand. This will lessen the symptoms you may be having.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

The *median nerve* and the *finger flexor tendons* travel through the same “tunnel” in your wrist. This is called the *carpal tunnel*. The median nerve runs down your arm and into your fingers. The finger flexor tendons connect the muscles in your forearm with your fingers and thumb. Together, they help you flex your fingers and clench your fist.

When injury or a condition reduces the space in the carpal tunnel, it may put pressure on the median nerve. This causes symptoms such as tingling, numbness, and pain.



The median nerve and the finger flexor tendons both travel through the carpal tunnel at the wrist.

How can I ease the symptoms?

What Not to Do

- Avoid flexing and extending your wrist too far forward and backward.
- Avoid any activity that makes you flatten your palm, such as pushing a heavy box or furniture, or leaning on a table or chair with your hand.
- Do **not** do activities that make you grip your hand tightly for long periods. Some of these are:
 - Carrying a suitcase, a bucket, or bags of groceries
 - Sweeping, vacuuming, raking, and mowing the lawn
 - Holding the steering wheel while you drive
 - Holding a paint brush, pen, or pencil
 - Holding a newspaper or book in front of you

- Do **not** do activities that make you pinch your fingers together for long periods. Some of these are:
 - Needlework and sewing
 - Writing by hand
- Do **not** do activities that require you to repeat the same wrist motions over and over. Some of these are:
 - Using a hammer, screwdriver, or cleaver
 - Using a staple gun, or stapling papers together
 - Crocheting and knitting
 - Raking and sweeping
 - Using tools that vibrate, such as a power drill
 - Playing some musical instruments (check with your OT)
 - Typing on a computer keyboard or using a mouse

What to Do

- If your doctor or occupational therapist (OT) advises it, wear wrist splints night and day. Splints keep your wrists in a neutral position.
- Pace your activities. Take breaks often.
- Do your exercises as directed by your OT.
- Hold your wrist in a neutral position as much as you can. Wearing your wrist splints will help you do this.
- Be aware of when you are gripping or pinching tightly, and practice relaxing. Use the methods your OT has shown you, and use objects that have larger diameters.
- Use both hands to lift and carry things.
- When lifting and carrying:
 - Use both hands.
 - Keep your hands close to your body. This uses your larger “core” muscles instead of the muscles in your hands and wrists.
- Reduce stress with aerobic exercise and other activities.
- Learn to say, “No, I can’t do that.”

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UWMC Occupational Therapy: 206.598.4830

Can carpal tunnel syndrome be treated?

Surgery is one way to treat carpal tunnel syndrome. But, hand and wrist exercises may also help lessen symptoms. Your hand therapist will teach you these exercises and tell you how often to do them.