

CARPAL TUNNEL



While surgery is sometimes required for those with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, for most people, physical therapy treatment can relieve pain and numbness and restore normal use of the hand, wrist, and arm without the need for surgery.

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

The carpal tunnel is the passageway in the wrist through which the median nerve runs. The median nerve controls many of the movements and sensations in the hand; it is often referred to as the “laborer’s nerve.” The carpal tunnel protects the nerve and surrounding tendons; however, pressure caused by over-crowding or irritation of the median nerve can cause pain, numbness, or tingling in some of your fingers, which is known as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS).

Who gets Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

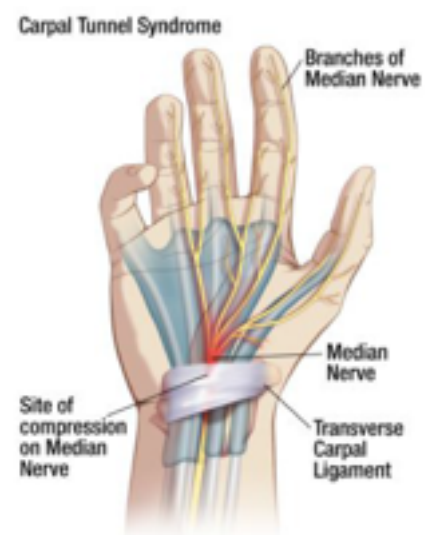
While we often think of CTS as affecting office workers who spend a lot of time on the computer, professions such as assembly line work and jobs requiring the use of hand tools are three times more likely to develop CTS. Extreme wrist positions, as well as a lot of finger use, especially with large forces or vibrations (such as holding the steering wheel when driving heavy machinery), are common causes of CTS.

Leisure activities can even contribute to CTS, such as sewing, racquetball, tennis, or playing stringed instruments such as the violin or guitar.

Symptoms usually begin gradually and are often more noticeable at night. Burning, tingling, pins and needles, or numbness are often described by those with CTS, and they may feel the need to “shake out” the hands to resolve the symptoms. As the condition continues to progress, the symptoms are noticed during the day and are often intensified when holding items such as a heavy book or hairbrush. A weakness of the hand and more constant numbness may occur if pressure on the nerve continues.

Certain health conditions can also increase the risk for CTS:

- Inflammation and swelling of the tendons in the wrist
- Injuries to the wrist (strain, sprain, dislocation, or fracture)
- Hormone/metabolic changes (pregnancy, menopause, thyroid imbalance)
- Fluid retention
- Diabetes
- Steroid use
- Degenerative and rheumatoid arthritis



How can Physical Therapy help?

Your physical therapist can help by educating you on ways to avoid aggravating the nerve, improving your posture, and helping to add stretch breaks into your daily routine. At the clinic, we'll work to strengthen the muscles in your hand, wrist, and forearm, stretch to improve your flexibility, and utilize modalities to inhibit pain. We can even visit your worksite to assess your work area and suggest adjustments.

If you or someone you know is experiencing pain or numbness in the fingers, hands, wrists, or forearms, or have noticed a decrease in grip strength, give us call to schedule a FREE carpal tunnel screening!