Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Hand care

Follow the tips in this handout to help decrease stress on the carpal tunnel area. 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. Finger flexors are cords that connect the muscles in your forearm with your fingers and thumb. Together, they help you flex your fingers and clench your fist.

Any condition that decreases the space in the carpal tunnel may squeeze or put pressure on the median nerve. This causes the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome, such as tingling, numbness, and pain.

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

When You Have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

- Avoid severe wrist flexion and extension (bending your wrist forward and backward).
- If your doctor or occupational therapist recommends it, wear wrist splints at night and during the day. These will keep your wrists in a neutral position.
- 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.
Questions?

Call 206-598-4830

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Occupational Therapy: 206-598-4830

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- 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
  - Driving and holding the steering wheel
  - 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 certain musical instruments (ask your occupational therapist)
  - Typing on a computer keyboard

Ways to Reduce Irritating Your Carpal Tunnel

- Pace your activities and take breaks often.
- Do your exercises as directed by your occupational therapist.
- Hold your wrist in a neutral position as much as possible. 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 therapist has shown you to use objects that have larger diameters.
- Use 2 hands to lift and carry things.
- When lifting objects, keep them 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.”

Carpal Tunnel Expansion Exercise

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 you should do them.