

Hand Therapy

Carpal tunnel syndrome – conservative management

What is it?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by pressure on the median nerve. The median nerve passes through the carpal tunnel in the wrist. The carpal tunnel is formed by bones of the wrist and a tough band of tissue called a ligament.

What are the common symptoms?

Pressure on the median nerve can cause pain, tingling, numbness, weakness and/or clumsiness.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

Conditions that reduce the amount of space in the carpal tunnel can cause carpal tunnel syndrome. Examples of these can include:

- Swelling after an injury such as a fracture.
- An over use injury where people use their hands in positions that make the tunnel smaller.
- Arthritis.
- Fluid retention from changes in hormones (such as pregnancy or menopause).
- Diabetes.

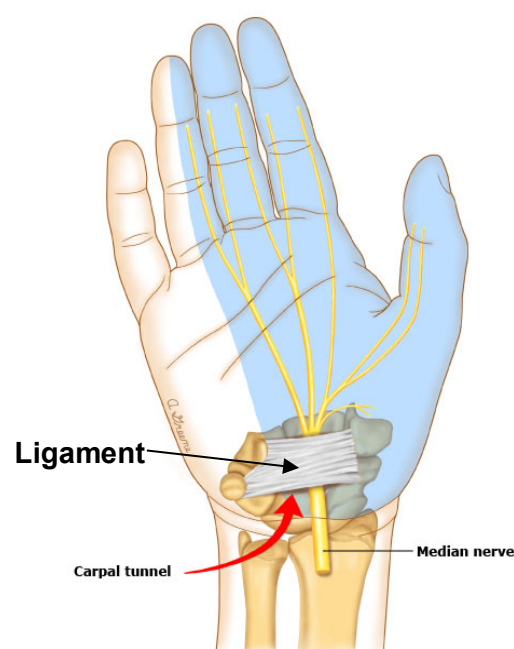
What can be done to help reduce symptoms?

Posture

The median nerve starts in your neck and travels the length of your arm. Poor posture can increase your symptoms. Your therapist may discuss this further with you if needed.

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□ Splinting

Splints help to lessen symptoms by increasing the space in the carpal tunnel. The splint rests the wrist in a straight position. When the wrist is straight, there is more space in the carpal tunnel. This reduces the pressure on the median nerve. It is recommended that you wear your splint when you are sleeping. For severe cases or if activity makes your symptoms worse your therapist may direct you to wear your splint during the day. It may take several weeks before you start to notice an improvement.

□ Changing the way you use your hands

Certain activities can increase your symptoms. Ways that you could reduce the impact of these activities include:

1. Reduce duration, frequency and/or force required during tasks:
 - Take regular breaks during heavier or repetitive tasks.
 - Consider other ways that a task can be completed.
 - Alternate heavier tasks with lighter tasks.
2. Avoid using your hand with your wrist in a bent position.
 - The carpal tunnel has more room when the wrist is straight. This means there is less pressure on the median nerve.
3. Avoid gripping for long periods or repeatedly:
 - Loosen your grip and change your position regularly when doing things such as reading a book or talking on the phone.
 - Use a trolley instead of holding a basket when grocery shopping.
 - Use tools/cutlery with thicker handles requiring less force to hold.
4. Changing your environment:
 - Review your computer station set up. Ask your therapist.
 - Consider using a gel mitt, cycle gloves or soft conforming handles to reduce vibration when using a lawn mower or riding a bike.

□ Exercises

Your therapist may provide you with gentle exercises.

Please contact your therapist if you have any queries or concerns.

Therapist _____ Phone Number _____