

NINDS Carpal Tunnel Syndrome Information Page

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Table of Contents (click to jump to sections)

[What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?](#)

[Is there any treatment?](#)

[What is the prognosis?](#)

[What research is being done?](#)

[Organizations](#)

[Related NINDS Publications and Information](#)

[Additional resources from MEDLINEplus](#)

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when tendons or ligaments in the wrist become enlarged, often from inflammation, after being aggravated. The narrowed tunnel of bones and ligaments in the wrist pinches the nerves that reach the fingers and the muscles at the base of the thumb. The first symptoms usually appear at night. Symptoms range from a burning, tingling numbness in the fingers, especially the thumb and the index and middle fingers, to difficulty gripping or making a fist, to dropping things. Some cases of carpal tunnel syndrome are due to work-related cumulative trauma of the wrist. Diseases or conditions that predispose to the development of carpal tunnel syndrome include pregnancy, diabetes, and obesity.

Is there any treatment?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is treated by immobilizing the wrist in a splint to minimize or prevent pressure on the nerves. If that fails, patients are sometimes given anti-inflammatory drugs or injections of cortisone in the wrist to reduce the swelling. There is also a surgical procedure in which doctors can open the wrist and cut the ligament at the bottom of the wrist to relieve the pressure. However, only a small percentage of patients require surgery.

What is the prognosis?

Approximately 1 percent of individuals with carpal tunnel syndrome develop permanent injury. The majority recover completely and can avoid reinjury by changing the way they do repetitive movements, the frequency with which they do the movements, and the amount of time they rest between periods when they perform the movements.

What research is being done?

Much of the on-going research on carpal tunnel syndrome is aimed at prevention and rehabilitation. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) funds research on carpal tunnel syndrome.

Select this link to view a list of studies currently seeking patients.

Organizations

American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA)

P.O. Box 850

Rocklin, CA 95677-0850

ACPA@pacbell.net

<http://www.theacpa.org>

Tel: 916-632-0922 800-533-3231

Fax: 916-632-3208

National Chronic Pain Outreach Association (NCPOA)

P.O. Box 274

Millboro, VA 24460

ncpoa@cfw.com

<http://www.chronicpain.org>

Tel: 540-862-9437

Fax: 540-862-9485

**National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
(NIAMS)**

National Institutes of Health

Bldg. 31, Rm. 4C05

Bethesda, MD 20892-2350

NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov

<http://www.nih.gov/niams>

Tel: 301-496-8188 877-22-NIAMS (226-4267)

Related NINDS Publications and Information

- [Carpal Tunnel Syndrome Fact Sheet](#)

Carpal tunnel syndrome fact sheet prepared by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

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