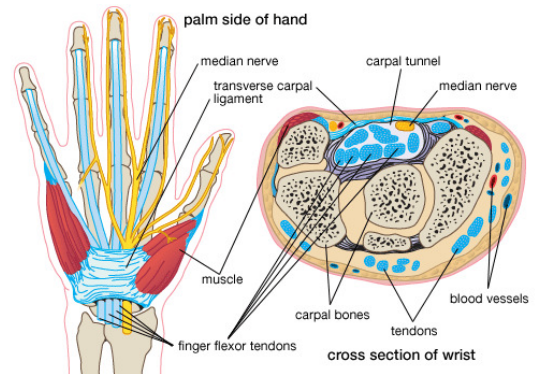


Important facts I

Carpal tunnel is a common problem affecting the wrist and hand. Repetitive work and typing is often blamed but lots of people get this problem regardless of the work they do.

Symptoms usually start gradually, with burning, tingling, or numbness in the hand. Patients report that their fingers can feel useless and swollen, even though little or no swelling is apparent. The symptoms often first appear in one or both hands at night. The person wakes up feeling the need to "shake out" the hand or wrist.



The condition is caused by anything that makes the area inside the carpal tunnel of the hand smaller. Or that increases the size of the tissues in the tunnel, for example an injury to the wrist. People with other conditions; diabetes, low thyroid function, and pregnant ladies are prone to carpal tunnel.

Work factors such as forceful and repetitive movements, and working in a bent wrist posture are risk factors as are smoking, obesity and a high caffeine intake. It is usually a combination of risk factors that cause the condition to develop.

A third of people will get better without any treatment within 6 months. The condition can recur. Up to 70% of people get better with conservative treatment. A few people need surgery to release the pressure on the tunnel. It is an effective operation but there are risk of complications with all surgery so conservative management should be tried first.

The important thing is to keep moving and using the arm, but to avoid activities that aggravate the problem such as forceful repetitive activities with your hand. Just as a runner would train slowly for a marathon, a sensible habit is to start new activities slowly and build gradually as this allows the muscles and tendons to adapt and strengthen to respond to the new demand.

It helps to stay at work or to get back to work as soon as possible, even if you have symptoms. **Your hand will usually not get any worse at work than it will at home.** If you have a repetitive or manual job then you may need some help or modification to your workload initially, but generally all that's needed are some simple changes. Talk to your line manager and ask for help to modify your job while the problem resolves.

Warning signs

If you have severe pain that does not improve or even gets worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with your arm pain then you should consult your doctor.