

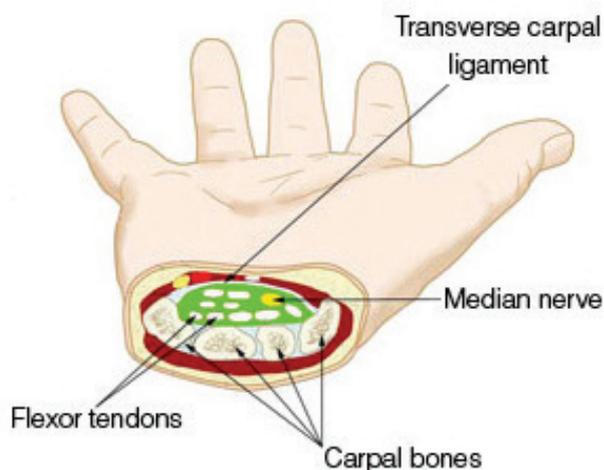
# Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

## What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

It is where the median nerve in the hand becomes irritated and sometimes compressed within a tunnel comprising a 'U' shaped collection of bones with a tight ligament at the top.

## What are the symptoms of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

- Pins and needles or tingling commonly affecting the thumb, index, middle and half of the ring finger but can affect the whole hand.
- Sometimes pain is a feature and can spread from the wrist up the arm.
- Symptoms often start slowly and are usually worse at night. It is common for people to wake up and shake their hands until the feeling returns.
- You may experience weakness in your thumb and difficulty gripping.
- In severe cases there is weakness in the hand and muscle wasting is visible.



## What causes Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

- It is often a result of a combination of factors that reduce the available space for the median nerve within the carpal tunnel, rather than a problem with the nerve.
- Contributing factors include: trauma to the wrist that causes swelling or a previous fracture, other illnesses eg diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, underactive thyroid gland, an overactive pituitary gland.
- Mechanical factors include work stress, repeated use of vibrating hand tools. Fluid retention during pregnancy or the menopause.
- Often there is not one cause that can be identified.

## Who gets Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

- Women are three times more likely to get carpal tunnel syndrome
- The dominant hand is usually affected first.
- You are more at risk if you are overweight or have other illness eg diabetes, arthritis, hypothyroidism, renal failure.
- More common in those performing assembly line work.

## How is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome diagnosed?

- Your description of the symptoms and the history.
- Physical examination and tests to reproduce your symptoms.
- A small number of patients may require nerve conduction studies if the diagnosis is unclear following examination and history taking.

## How is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome treated?

- Activity modification
- Splint, often worn at night time, works especially well during pregnancy
- Injection of steroid which brings down the swelling around the nerve.

## Will I need surgery?

Surgery is recommended if:

- you have had the problem for a long time;
- your symptoms are severe;
- non-surgical treatments have failed; or
- the clinician treating you detects wasting of muscles or marked loss of sensation in the hand.

Surgery involves cutting the ligament over the tunnel to relieve the pressure on the nerve. The operation is usually performed under local anaesthetic.

## Help us get it right

If you have a complaint, concern, comment or compliment please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0113 220 8585**, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or email [lch.pet@nhs.net](mailto:lch.pet@nhs.net)

**We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.**

For more information on the best course treatment for you, please visit the following website:  
[sdm.rightcare.nhs.uk/](http://sdm.rightcare.nhs.uk/)

This has information about the benefits and risks of many of the different treatments you may be considering (including surgery).