

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

This condition affects the median nerve of the hand, which runs through a very narrow passageway in the wrist (the carpal tunnel) and provides feeling and strength to part of the palm and some fingers. It affects mainly women between the ages of 40 and 60 years and may appear in both hands.

What are the causes?

The cause is often unknown, so it is said to be an idiopathic disorder. It is sometimes associated with repetitive hand movements in the workplace. It occurs most frequently in people with diabetes, thyroid disorders or obesity and pregnant women.

What are the symptoms?

The most common are tingling and aches in the fingers, that is worse at night. You may have pain in your hand, wrist or forearm or your hand may be swollen or numb when you wake up. In very advanced cases, it can cause weakness in the hand and fingers.

How is it diagnosed?

In most cases, your GP will ask you a few questions about the symptoms and conduct a physical examination to determine the diagnosis. Sometimes, a test called electromyography may be ordered. This test is conducted by trained physicians and provides accurate information on the state of the nerve. It is not a complicated procedure, involves little discomfort and should not take more than 30 minutes. No X-rays or blood tests are required.

How is it treated?

The most effective treatments are wearing a wrist splint at night or corticosteroid injections. In the most severe cases minor surgery may be called for. It is performed at the hospital on an outpatient basis (it does not require general anesthesia). Full recovery usually takes 3 to 4 weeks.

