

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

This condition affects a nerve of the hand, the median nerve, which supplies sensation and strength to one part of the palm and to some fingers. The median nerve crosses the wrist through a very narrow passage, the carpal tunnel. This syndrome is seen mainly in women between 40 and 60 years of age and may appear in both hands.

How is it caused?

Because its origin is frequently unknown, it is said to be an idiopathic disorder. It may also result from repetitive work with the hands and may particularly affect people with diabetes, thyroid disorders or obesity, and pregnant women.

Aches and pains

Pins and needles in the fingers are most frequent, mainly at night. One may also experience hand, wrist or forearm pain, and wake up with a swollen and numb hand. In very advanced cases, decreased strength of hand and fingers may occur.

How is it diagnosed?

In most cases, discomforts explained by the patient and simple examination at the family doctor's office are sufficient for diagnosis. Sometimes, a test called electromyography may be required. This test is conducted by trained physicians and provides accurate information on the state of the nerve.

Electromyography 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?

Most effective treatments include wearing a wrist splint at night, or corticosteroid injections. Your doctor may also prescribe drug products to you.

Most severe cases involve small surgery performed at the hospital on an outpatient basis —general anesthesia is not required. Full recovery is generally attained in 3 to 4 weeks.

