

Carpal Tunnel

The carpal tunnel is a passageway composed of ligaments and bones in the wrist. The median nerve runs through this passageway. Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition in which the median nerve gets compressed as it passes through this tunnel. This compression can be due to anything that causes narrowing of the carpal tunnel, such as inflammation of the tendons which run through the tunnel, sprains, fractures, repetitive wrist movements or some people are born with a smaller carpal tunnel.

The symptoms can include numbness, tingling, weakness and pain in the thumb and fingers (besides the little finger) on the palmar side of the hand. The pain can radiate to the forearm, elbow or shoulder. The symptoms are often most apparent during the night as most people sleep with their wrists bent forward, which subsequently makes the tunnel more narrow and the nerve becomes squashed.

Women are three times more likely to develop carpal tunnel syndrome than men. The dominant hand is usually affected. People with diabetes or other metabolic disorders are more susceptible to the condition. The condition usually affects adults only.

Early diagnosis and treatment is important to prevent permanent damage to the median nerve. Treatment involves avoidance of aggravating activities, bracing/splinting, massage of the wrist muscles, stretching, strengthening exercises, anti-inflammatory medications and ice. If symptoms persist after months of conservative treatment, a surgical opinion may be appropriate.

