

**Orthopaedic and Sports Injuries Services "OASIS"**  
**Munawar Shah FRCS, FRCS Tr & Orth**  
Consultant Trauma & Orthopaedic Surgeon

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## Patient Information Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

**What is it?** Carpal tunnel syndrome is the term used to describe the symptoms associated with pressure on the median nerve at the wrist. Electrical messages travel along nerves from the brain to different muscles to make them work. They also send messages from the skin to the brain so that we can feel different textures and temperatures. The median nerve is one of the main nerves of the hand. The median nerve is a connection between the fingers and the spinal cord. It passes through a tunnel deep in the wrist along with nine tendons, which bend the fingers. The nerve and each of the tendons are nearly as wide as a pencil. The tunnel is only a little over an inch wide, just big enough to hold the nerve and tendons. When the tendons are irritated the lining around the tendons swells up and puts pressure on the nerve. This pressure cuts off the blood supply to the nerve.

**What causes it?** In most cases there is no obvious cause. Swelling from other problems e.g. trigger finger, arthritis at the base of the thumb, rheumatoid arthritis, and the effect of wrist fractures may aggravate or bring on carpal tunnel syndrome. Compression of the nerve elsewhere e.g. the neck, thyroid problems, diabetes and pregnancy may also cause symptoms similar to those of carpal tunnel.

**What are the symptoms?** Early symptoms occur during sleeping, fluid pressure builds up when the hand is at rest, this is because

swelling is relieved by normal use of the hand which pumps extra fluid out of the carpal tunnel. Bending the wrist also increases pressure on the nerve.

Symptoms include pain, tingling, numbness, swelling, weakness or clumsiness of the thumb, index, middle and ring finger. In more advanced cases symptoms occur during waking hours. If the nerve has been under pressure for some time the muscle at the base of the thumb can become wasted.

**How carpal tunnel is diagnosed?** A detailed medical history is taken and an examination of the hand, arm, and neck is carried out.

If carpal tunnel syndrome is suspected, nerve conduction studies (NCS) are often carried out to confirm the diagnosis. This involves an out patient appointment at another hospital. NCS measures the time taken for an electrical impulse to travel over a given distance. These tests can be uncomfortable as they stimulate the nerve. Other investigations may be carried out such as blood tests and x-rays to eliminate other conditions.

**What can you do to help?** Wear a splint or brace at night to help reduce the symptoms.

Take over the counter medications such as Anti-inflammatory tablets e.g. Ibuprofen. Check with the Pharmacist or your G.P regarding possible side effects or drug interactions.

**What can we do to help?** Once carpal tunnel syndrome is confirmed by nerve conduction studies or definite diagnosis of symptoms, surgery may be an option.

**What surgery involves?** An incision is made to open the carpal tunnel. This relieves pressure on the median nerve. It heals with more space inside for the nerves and tendons.



Surgery usually takes place as a day case, however, an over night stay may be necessary if you live alone.

The operation is carried out under local anaesthetic, in the operating theatre and usually only leaves a small scar.

When you go home you will have a large dressing on your hand, this will be reduced after 2 days.

Sutures are removed at 10 days post operation; the hand must be kept dry during this time.

Some patients may have a painful scar for sometime following surgery. If this happens, hand therapy and scar desensitisation can often help.

### **Success of Treatment**

Most reports indicate that if carpal tunnel is the only problem, over 95% of patients have a satisfactory outcome from surgery.

Pressure on the nerve for a long time before treatment may lead to incomplete recovery.

### **Further information**

If you are interested in making an appointment to discuss a treatment, Please call us on telephone 01215807406

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