

# Carpal tunnel exercises: Can they relieve symptoms?

## I've been diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome. Would regular hand and wrist exercises help me avoid surgery?

Answer From Peter C. Amadio, M.D.

Probably not. Carpal tunnel exercises alone aren't likely to relieve symptoms, such as pain and numbness. These exercises are most effective when combined with other treatments, such as behavior changes or wrist splints, for mild to moderate carpal tunnel syndrome. If your symptoms are severe, you'll likely still need surgery to get relief.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by compression of the median nerve as it passes through the carpal tunnel and under the transverse carpal ligament at the wrist. Nerve-gliding exercises — one type of carpal tunnel exercise — might help the median nerve move normally, but might worsen symptoms. If a median nerve remains trapped, nerve-gliding exercises can stretch, irritate or injure the nerve.

Despite their limitations, carpal tunnel exercises might help:

- **To complement another treatment.** Carpal tunnel exercises might help mild to moderate symptoms when combined with other treatments, such as changing your activities, wrist splinting or corticosteroid injections.
- **After surgery to prevent nerve scarring.** Range-of-motion exercises — which may include nerve-gliding exercises — might help heal significant trauma to the wrist, such as a wrist fracture that requires surgery or repair near the carpal tunnel.

If your doctor recommends carpal tunnel exercises, start them gradually to ensure they don't cause more harm than good.

With

Peter C. Amadio, M.D.

## Show References

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