

Carpal tunnel syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is pressure on a nerve in your wrist. It causes tingling, numbness and pain in your hand and fingers. You can often treat it yourself, but it can take months to get better.

Check if you have carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS)

The symptoms of CTS include:

- an ache or pain in your fingers, hand or arm
- numb hands
- tingling or pins and needles
- a weak thumb or difficulty gripping

These symptoms often start slowly and come and go. They're usually worse at night.

How to treat carpal tunnel syndrome yourself

CTS sometimes clears up by itself in a few months, particularly if you have it because you're pregnant.

Wear a wrist splint

A wrist splint is something you wear on your hand to keep your wrist straight. It helps to relieve pressure on the nerve.

You wear it at night while you sleep. You'll have to wear a splint for at least 4 weeks before you start to feel better.

You can buy wrist splints online or from pharmacies.

Stop or cut down on things that may be causing it

Stop or cut down on anything that causes you to frequently bend your wrist or grip hard. This could be using vibrating tools for work or playing an instrument.

Painkillers

Painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen may offer short-term relief from carpal tunnel pain.

But there's little evidence to say they can treat the cause of CTS, so it's important not to rely on them.

Hand exercises

There's a small amount of evidence to suggest hand exercises help ease the symptoms of CTS.

See a GP if:

- your symptoms are getting worse or are not going away
- treatment at home is not working

What happens at your appointment

Your GP can usually diagnose CTS by asking about your symptoms and checking your hand.

If they're not sure it's CTS, they may refer you to hospital for tests, such as nerve conduction studies. These measure how fast an electrical impulse moves through your nerve and can identify nerve damage.

Treatment for CTS from a GP

If a wrist splint does not help, your GP might recommend a steroid injection into your wrist. This brings down swelling around the nerve, easing the symptoms of CTS.

Steroid injections are not always a cure. CTS can come back after a few months and you may need another injection.

Carpal tunnel syndrome surgery

If your CTS is getting worse and other treatments have not worked, your GP might refer you to a specialist to discuss surgery.

Surgery usually cures CTS. You and your specialist will decide together if it's the right treatment for you.

A local anaesthetic injection numbs your wrist so you do not feel pain and a small cut is made in your hand. The roof of the carpal tunnel inside your wrist is cut so it no longer puts pressure on the nerve.

The operation takes around 20 minutes and you do not have to stay in hospital overnight.

It can take a month after the operation to get back to normal activities.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS)

CTS happens when the carpal tunnel inside your wrist swells and squeezes one of your median

nerves.

You're more at risk if you:

- are overweight
- are pregnant
- do work or hobbies that mean you repeatedly bend your wrist or grip hard, such as using vibrating tools
- have another illness, such as arthritis or diabetes
- have a parent, brother or sister with CTS
- have previously injured your wrist

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