

# Carpal tunnel syndrome

## What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is caused by compression of the median nerve - the main nerve into the hand within a tunnel in the wrist. Symptoms may include tingling, numbness or pain in the hand and fingers. They may be worse at night. These symptoms can be cured by a small operation under local anaesthetic which releases the roof of the tunnel. Following the procedure your night tingling and pain should settle promptly but numbness in the fingers may take weeks or months to disappear.

## The operation

This takes about 15 minutes. A local anaesthetic is injected into the wrist and may sting for a short while. At the end of the operation the small incision will be sutured with dissolving stitches, a further anaesthetic inserted and a dressing applied. The local anaesthetic will prevent any immediate post-operative pain but the hand and fingers may remain numb for more than six hours after the surgery. Before this effect wears off you should take the painkillers that are prescribed for 24-48 hours.

## Following the operation

Keep the hand elevated at all times for the first 48-72 hours to prevent swelling and stiffness of the fingers. Please remember not to walk with your hand dangling, or to sit with your hand held in your lap. Continue to exercise the hand and to perform normal light activities.

- You will be discharged with a bulky bandage. You can take this off 48-72 hours after the operation. Under the bandage, there will be a sticky plaster on your hand. If this is spotlessly clean, leave it where it is. If it has some blood on it, which is normal, take the plaster off, wipe

the wound clean and apply a fresh sticky plaster. There will be one in your bandage, like a "pass the parcel".

- Look out for any redness or tenderness in the area around the wound which might indicate an infection.
- Keep it clean and dry until the stitches are dissolved.
- After one week you may drive as long as you are comfortable and have regained full finger movements and are in full control of the vehicle.
- Keep the wound covered until you are seen in clinic at 10-14 days after the operation.

## After the stitches come out/dissolve

You will have a scar on your palm. This will be firm to touch and possibly tender for 6-8 weeks. This can be helped by massaging the scar firmly with your favourite moisturiser. Massaging the scar will also help to desensitise the area. If you have any problems with scar massage, normal function or rehabilitation please contact the physiotherapy department on 01483 555815 and make an appointment with the hand therapist.

You may find your grip is slightly weak. This will gradually improve over the next 3-6 months.

## Long term prognosis

Pins and needles in your fingers that wake you in the night and during the day should resolve quickly. However, numbness can take much longer to recover and the longer you have had carpal tunnel the longer this numbness will take to go away. It can take as long as 18 months. For some people, if the numbness has been profound and the muscles of the hand are already wasted you may then have permanent numbness.

If you have any questions, please contact the One Orthopaedics office:

Mr Hearnden's secretary by phone 01483 506729 or email [ajh@oneorth.co.uk](mailto:ajh@oneorth.co.uk)  
Mr Logan's secretary by phone 01483 938755 or email [jsl@oneorth.co.uk](mailto:jsl@oneorth.co.uk)

For urgent issues, or out of office hours, please contact the hospital where you had your procedure.