

**NHS Buckinghamshire Musculoskeletal
Integrated Care Service (MusIC)**

Carpal tunnel syndrome



What is carpal tunnel?

The carpal tunnel refers to an area at the base of the wrist which contains bones, nerves, ligaments and muscles allowing your wrist and hand to move normally.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

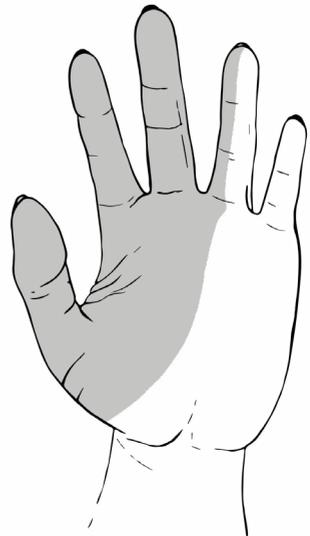
Symptoms occur when the nerve becomes irritated by pressure within the "tunnel". There can be many reasons for this, but possible causes can include: swelling and tension around the tendons, bony injuries and arthritis. Fluid retention during pregnancy can also sometimes cause swelling in the tunnel.

Symptoms are made worse by keeping the wrist bent for long periods of time. Symptoms are often a result of overuse from work or repetitive activities.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary from person to person depending on what is causing them. Typically, symptoms include numbness, tingling and/or pain in the arm, hand and/or fingers of the affected side.

The symptoms can be noticed during the day and night depending on which activities aggravate your symptoms. You may notice increased pain when the wrist is bent for long periods of time. You may notice a weaker grip, or clumsiness when using your hand.



* Common pain distribution shaded in grey

Making a diagnosis

A physiotherapist will typically use one or two tests to diagnose a carpal tunnel problem. If carpal tunnel syndrome is diagnosed then your therapist can advise you on the best course of action to manage it.

What is the treatment?

The appropriate treatment for you may differ depending on the extent of your symptoms. The first thing to try is a wrist splint especially at night time. If this isn't enough to settle your symptoms your therapist may advise you on activities to continue or avoid depending on which movements aggravate your symptoms. You will most likely be provided gentle exercises to do.

If symptoms do not improve with typical methods then your therapist will discuss further options with you.

Further management

Some people will be advised to use a wrist splint to help support the wrist and better manage the symptoms. People may also receive an injection for the symptoms if physiotherapy isn't able to settle the symptoms.

Only a relatively small percentage of patients require surgery as typical exercise treatments are enough to relieve the symptoms. If surgery is required your physiotherapist will advise you on what to expect.

Exercise plan (Repeat all exercises 2-3 times per day)

Do the movements slowly.

Do not stay in any position for any length of time.

Exercise 1: Median nerve gliding no. 1



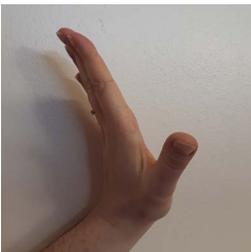
A. Wrist in neutral, fingers and thumb is bent.



B. Wrist and thumb in neutral, fingers extended.



C. Wrist and fingers extended, thumb in neutral.



D. Wrist, fingers and thumb extended.

Exercise 2: Median nerve gliding exercise no.2



A. Begin with your elbow and your wrist bent across your chest.



B. Start to straighten out your elbow and your wrist.

Exercise 3: Median nerve gliding exercise no. 3

A. Take your arm out to the side. Straighten your elbow with your wrist bent.



B. As you continue to straighten your elbow bend your wrist backward until you feel a pulling into your arm, then bend your elbow back to the starting position.



Stop and return to **exercise 2** if you feel a strong pull in your arm at any time.

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