

## Carpel tunnel syndrome

### Patient guide for management and treatment

This leaflet covers the diagnosis of your Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), the possible treatments, and how you can help yourself to ease the symptoms, as this is a health problem that can be remedied.

Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS):

- Can be painful.
- Can develop slowly, as a result of trauma or repetitive strain.
- May be eased if you relieve the compression of the nerve by wearing a splint, especially at night.
- May improve if you continue bending your wrists and maintain your strength through regular daily exercise, and if it is protected from further repetitive strain injury.
- May be treated with a corticosteroid injection.
- You may require surgery.

### What is carpal tunnel syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by compression (squashing) of the median nerve in the carpal tunnel, at the base of the hand and thumb. The nerve gets compressed if the carpal tendons (there are nine around the median nerve) become swollen, possibly after a fracture, repetitive strain from typing, guitar playing, similar action or from another condition, such as pregnancy.

### Symptoms and treatments

It is relatively common in the UK, with about three per cent of men and five per cent of women being affected at some stage, mostly after 30 years of age.

While the symptoms can disappear on their own, often they can be relieved by exercise and by wearing a splint at night (so that the neutral position of the wrist in the splint reduces the compression).



When symptoms are mild or moderate, then corticosteroid (anti-inflammatory medicine) injection can help. There is no evidence that non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen can benefit in any way. Speak to your GP about pain control options.

For some people, symptoms continue and the only option is for surgery. Surgery cannot undo the nerve damage that has already been done, so complete resolution of symptoms is not guaranteed. There are two methods available are open surgery, which leaves a long thin scar along the palm side of the hand or wrist or keyhole surgery, which leaves three or so short scars.

### Exercises to help ease your condition

Exercises to strengthen and move the muscles, illustrated here, are very important, and work well, especially for those who have developed carpal tunnel syndrome through repetitive strain injuries that involve the hands and fingers.

