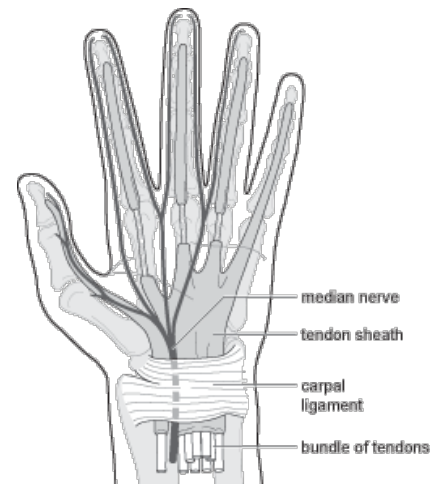




What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a very common condition where one of the main nerves in the hand (the **Median** nerve) is compressed as it passes through a space on the front of the wrist into the palm. This causes symptoms of ‘pins and needles’ and numbness in the fingers, and pain in the hand and wrist. In the longer term, there may be weakness of the hand, wasting of the muscles and permanent alteration of sensation.

When the tissue that surrounds the tendons and nerve (the **Tendon Sheath**) thickens – the pressure within this space is increased and the nerve is compressed.



How is it diagnosed and treated?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome can be diagnosed on the basis of the history and examination. The diagnosis can be confirmed with **Nerve Conduction Studies**, a test performed by a neurologist where the speed of electrical impulses travelling in the nerve are measured. Slowing of these impulses is seen in **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**. Imaging with Ultrasound or MRI is occasionally used as well.

When symptoms are mild and intermittent, **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** can be treated by using a splint. In addition, an injection of Cortisone to the tendon sheath can reduce the volume of this tissue and relieve pressure on the nerve.

With persistent, progressive or severe symptoms, surgery is an effective treatment. The operation is called a **Carpal Tunnel Release** and works by dividing the fibrous band (the **Carpal ligament**) that forms the roof of the **Carpal Tunnel** and reduces pressure upon the nerve. The surgery can either be done by direct incision, (an **Open Carpal Tunnel Release**) or using smaller incisions, specialised instruments and a camera to see the carpal ligament as it is released, (an **Endoscopic Carpal Tunnel Release**). Your surgeon will discuss these options with you and what is likely to be better suited to you.

If I need surgery, what will happen to me afterwards?

While for most people the symptoms of numbness and ‘pins and needles’ may settle quickly after surgery, if the Carpal Tunnel Syndrome has been severe or present for a long time, the numbness may persist. The scar in the palm can be tender for some time but usually settles over a couple of months after surgery.

Returning to normal activity including sports and work will depend on the individual but can be achieved in most people within a few weeks.

