



Carpal tunnel syndrome

You came to the emergency department with numbness, tingling or pain in your hand. The doctor thinks this is carpal tunnel syndrome. It is not an emergency, and it can usually be treated by your family doctor. This sheet explains what helps.

What is it?

A nerve runs through a narrow tunnel in your wrist to your hand. If it gets squeezed, you may feel tingling, numbness or pain in the thumb and first fingers, often worse at night. Your hand may feel weak or clumsy. It is more common in pregnancy, diabetes, an underactive thyroid, and with repeated wrist work. It often improves with simple treatment.

Looking after yourself at home

- Wear a wrist splint at night if you were given one or can buy one. It keeps the wrist straight.
- Take regular breaks from tasks that bend the wrist or grip tightly.
- Shake or gently move your hand when it tingles.
- Avoid sleeping on your hand or with the wrist bent.
- Keep your hand warm; cold can make symptoms worse.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may also help, unless your doctor told you not to. Avoid it with a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or pregnancy.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre within 2 to 4 weeks.
- Your doctor may suggest a nerve test, a steroid injection, or referral for a small operation.
- See them sooner if the numbness becomes constant or your hand gets weaker.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, or trouble speaking
- Your hand or fingers become cold, pale or blue
- Severe, fast-increasing pain and swelling in the hand or forearm, especially after an injury
- You suddenly cannot move your fingers or thumb



Scan to read this sheet on your phone

This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

EM Orbit · Emergency medicine, in one orbit · carpal-tunnel-en