

Spring 2008



Neurosurgical
Associates, Ltd.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

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Have you ever said “*I wake up at night with my hand(s) asleep and need to shake them to wake them up*” or “*My hands go to sleep when I drive*”? If so, you may have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS).

What causes CTS? The median nerve, one of the main nerves to the hand, runs through a tunnel in the wrist to reach the hand. This tunnel is formed by the bones, tendons and the transverse carpal ligament. Repeated tasks can cause inflammation of the tendons or ligaments, narrowing the tunnel and putting pressure on the median nerve causing your symptoms.

What are some symptoms of CTS? Numbness and tingling which often starts gradually are the most common symptoms of carpal tunnel. This most often occurs in the thumb, index and middle finger. Hand pain, hand weakness, dropping things, burning, itching, and inability to feel hot and cold are also symptoms. The pain may radiate all the way up the arm. Some patients will feel as if their hand is swollen even though it is not. Symptoms are often worse at night. Patients may awaken at night with their hand(s) asleep and feel the need to

shake out their hands to relieve the symptoms. Symptoms may also worsen when holding the hands in certain positions, such as reading the newspaper, driving, typing or using tools.

What are some factor associated with CTS? Repetitive movements, awkward hand positions, repeated forceful grasping, hand or wrist trauma, arthritis, cyst or tumor, pregnancy or menopause, obesity, hereditary metabolic disorders, tenosynovitis, hypothyroidism and diabetes are the most common factors.

How can CTS be diagnosed? CTS is most often diagnosed on history and symptoms, physical examination of the hand, arm, shoulder and neck, and electrodiagnostic testing (EMG). Other tests, including x-ray or MRI, are rarely needed.

What are some treatment options? Resting the affected hand for a few days is always a good start. Wearing wrist splints during the night and during aggravating activities often provide significant symptom relief. Anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen or corticosteroids (prednisone) may be helpful, occasionally diuretics (water pills) are pre-

scribed. Vitamin B6 supplements may also improve symptoms. Corticosteroid injections may reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms. In some cases, hand therapy with a physical or occupational hand therapist, may be helpful.

What if the conservative approaches do not work? When symptoms last more than six months, are severe, or if there is a significant loss of muscle (atrophy), surgery is usually recommended. Surgery is an outpatient procedure lasting thirty minutes to one hour. It consists of making a small incision in the wrist to cut the transverse carpal ligament, thereby relieving the pressure on the nerve. Risks include damage to blood vessels or nerves, infection, or unrelieved symptoms. Symptoms are often much improved immediately after surgery, but may take weeks to months to improve.



Carpal Tunnel Incision

Dr. Walski-Easton's offices are located at:

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- and -

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Call 952-926-2711 to schedule an appointment

Sabrina Walski-Easton, M.D. earned her medical degree and completed her Neurosurgery residency at the University of MN. Some of Dr. Walski-Easton's interests center around complex spine surgeries, brain tumors, epidural steroid injections, minimally invasive spine procedures, carpal tunnel releases, artificial cervical disk replacement and vertebroplasty. She practices at our Edina and Burnsville offices and performs surgeries at Fairview Southdale, Fairview Ridges and Abbott Northwestern. Dr. Walski-Easton joined Neurosurgical Associates in 2006.