



# Loss Control Insight

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

## Prevent Carpal Tunnel Syndrome Before It Strikes

Whether you are working at your desk or using tools that absorb vibration (i.e. jackhammer) trying to ignore the tingling or numbness you've had for months in your hand and wrist. Suddenly, a sharp, piercing pain shoots through the wrist and up your arm. Just a passing cramp? More likely you have carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), a painful progressive condition caused by compression of a key nerve in the wrist.



### What is CTS?

The carpal tunnel is the conduit for the hand's median nerve which controls sensation and for tendons which control the movement of the thumb and fingers. The small bones in the hand form the bottom of this "tunnel" and the carpal ligament forms the top of the "tunnel". When repetitive movement or overuse repeatedly stresses these tendons, they can become inflamed and swollen. This swelling reduces room in the tunnel and puts pressure on the median nerve. The resulting sensation is one of pain and numbness.

The first symptom of CTS is numbness, tingling, or pain in fingers. This pain, if the syndrome is advanced, can radiate out into the shoulder and neck and can be strong enough to wake you out of a deep sleep.

Recognizing the onset of CTS can be a major factor in helping you avoid surgery – one of the common ways advanced CTS is repaired. Preventative measures, however, are always the best way to avoid injury at work. Keeping your forearm and wrist straight is the correct position that causes the least amount of strain.

### Who is at risk of developing carpal tunnel syndrome?

Women are three times more likely than men to develop carpal tunnel syndrome, perhaps because the carpal tunnel itself may be smaller in women than in men. The dominant hand is usually affected first and produces the most severe pain. Persons with diabetes or other metabolic disorders that directly affect the body's nerves and make them more susceptible to compression are also at high risk. Carpal tunnel syndrome usually occurs only in adults.

Here are two simple exercises that can strengthen your wrists and reduce potential strain on the tendons.

- Rotation - First, extend your arm and make a fist. Now rotate your wrist in one direction 15 times. Then change the direction and rotate another 15 times. Now, extend your fingers and repeat.
- Stretch -Again, make a fist. Then, extend your fingers as far apart as possible and hold this stretch for 10 seconds. Repeat this stretch 10 times until your hands and wrists feel relaxed.

### How is carpal tunnel syndrome treated?

Treatments for carpal tunnel syndrome should begin as early as possible, under a doctor's direction. Initial treatment generally involves resting the affected hand and wrist for at least 2 weeks, avoiding activities that may worsen symptoms, and immobilizing the wrist in a splint to avoid further damage from twisting or bending. If there is inflammation, applying cool packs can help reduce swelling.