



Carpal Tunnel

If you experience an ache, weakness, pins and needles and numbness in your wrist and hand you may have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

What Is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is where the median nerve may be compressed within the carpal tunnel. The carpal tunnel is a passage that runs on the palmar surface of your wrist, in which tendons and nerves run from your forearm to your hand. Narrowing in this space causes compression of the nerve resulting in pain, weakness, pins and needles, and numbness of your wrist and hand. Sometimes this pain can also radiate to your forearm, elbow and shoulder. Pain, weakness and numbness are most common of a night time or early in the morning. It can be aggravated during hand and arm activities and you may notice difficulty grasping objects.

Why does it happen?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome occurs due to inflammation within the carpal tunnel that compromises the space of the median nerve. This inflammation can be caused by direct trauma such as falling onto an outstretched hand or from repetitive use or an increase in activity. It is common in racquet sports, gymnastics and cycling as well as work within the trade industry, desk jobs and sewing or knitting.

What will a physiotherapist do?

A physiotherapist will first assess your pain and establish and address the causative factors.

Conservative management of your carpal tunnel involves rest from the aggravating activities. Soft tissue massage may be used to reduce the tightness of your forearm flexor muscles. A gentle pain-free flexibility and strengthening program may also be initiated.

The physiotherapist may also supply you with a wrist splint to prevent further narrowing through the carpal tunnel. This has positive effects, particularly when wearing it overnight.

What about sport and returning to activity?

A return to full activities is possible after the pain in your wrist and hand has subsided. This can take anywhere from a few weeks to months depending on the severity of your condition. The physiotherapist may also make alterations to your technique or equipment that may otherwise be contributing to your carpal tunnel syndrome.

Outcome

Minor carpal tunnel syndrome responds well with physiotherapy treatment, especially in conjunction with medical management such as anti-inflammatories, and the pain generally subsides within a few weeks. More chronic conditions can take much longer and sometimes surgical management is required.