novus health

NHS

Physical Health

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

General Information Leaflet

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Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome is essentially a pinched nerve in the wrist. There is a space in the wrist called the carpal tunnel where the median nerve and nine tendons pass from the forearm into the hand. Carpal tunnel syndrome happens when pressure builds up from swelling in this tunnel and puts pressure on the nerve.

Causes

- Swelling of the lining of the flexor tendons, called tenosynovitis
- Joint dislocations
- Fractures
- Arthritis
- Fluid retention during pregnancy

The situations listed above can narrow the carpal tunnel or cause swelling in the tunnel. Thyroid conditions, rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes can also be associated with carpal tunnel syndrome. Ultimately, there can be many causes of this condition.

Signs and symptoms

- Pain
- Numbness
- Tingling
- Weak grip
- Occasional clumsiness
- Tendency to drop things

The numbness or tingling most often takes place in the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers. The symptoms are usually felt during the night but may also be noticed during daily activities such as driving or reading a newspaper. In severe cases, sensation and strength may be permanently lost.

Diagnosis

A detailed history including medical conditions, how the hands have been used, and any prior injuries is important in diagnosing carpal tunnel syndrome. An x-ray may be taken to check for arthritis or a fracture.

In some cases, laboratory tests may be done. Nerve conduction studies are also a possibility to confirm the diagnosis and check for other possible nerve problems.

Treatment

Some treatment options are:

- Changing patterns of hand use (helps reduce pressure on the nerve)
- Keeping the wrist splinted in a straight position (helps reduce pressure on the nerve)
- Wearing wrist splints at night (helps relieve symptoms that interfere with sleep)
- Steroid injections into the carpal tunnel (helps reduce swelling around the nerve)

If you decide not to have surgery initially you will be contacted approximately 8 weeks after your initial appointment to determine what improvement in your symptoms has been experienced.

Further treatment options will be discussed and agreed.

When symptoms are severe or do not improve, surgery may be needed to make more room for the nerve.

Pressure on the nerve is decreased by cutting the ligament at the top of the tunnel on the palm side of the hand.

Further information on Steroid Injections

A steroid injection is given to reduce any inflammation, swelling or pain which could be the result of carpal tunnel syndrome.

In order to have a steroid injection, you will be required to give informed consent. The GP Screener will discuss this with you at your appointment, and if a steroid injection is found to be the most appropriate treatment they will ask you to sign a consent form.

- If you are taking anticoagulants, for example Warfarin, you should inform the GP Screener prior to administration of the injection.
- Side effects are very unlikely, however, the following are possible:
    1. An increase in pain within the first 24 hours which usually settles within 48 hours.
    2. Very rarely infection might be introduced at the site of the injection. If the injection site becomes more painful and hot to the touch, please see your GP.
    3. Some thinning or colour change in the skin at the injection site.
    4. Facial flushing or interference with the menstrual cycle.
- If you feel any discomfort having had the injection you should take regular pain relief (please follow the manufacturer's recommended instructions).
- You should not drive immediately following the injection. It is best to avoid strenuous use of your hand for the first couple of days.
- The injection could take a few days to become effective but will give benefit for 2 months or longer in 70% of cases.
- Accidental injury to the median nerve during injection is a rare occurrence (approx 1 in a 1000). If this occurs it usually gets better with conservative treatment but make take a few months. More serious cases may require surgery.

What is Carpal Tunnel Surgery?

It involves making a cut along the front of your wrist and the palm of your hand to release the tight ligament (flexor retinaculum) that is squashing the nerve.

The procedure lasts approximately 20 to 30 minutes and is performed as a day case under local anaesthetic, this means you will be awake during the procedure and can usually go home approximately 1 hour after the procedure is completed.

What should I expect before the operation?

The Surgeon will explain the procedure, ensure that surgery is the right option for you, give you an opportunity to ask any questions, and you will be asked to sign a consent form. This confirms that you understand the risks, benefits and possible alternatives to the procedure and have given your permission for it to go ahead.

Even at this stage you are under no obligation to go through with the procedure if you change your mind.

What are the risks?

There are risks with all surgery, but for this procedure they are relatively small and usually manageable. They include:

- **Infection:** any operation can be followed by infection and this would be treated with antibiotics.
- **Scar:** you will have a scar that will be somewhat firm to touch and tender for 6–8 weeks.
- **Stiffness:** this can occur if the hand is not used and exercised after the operation. This is usually temporary and can be treated with exercise given in the post procedure information leaflet.
- **Failure of intent:** may be due to incomplete release to pre-operative scarring in the nerve.
- **Recurrence:** up to 4 in 10 ganglions return after being removed. There is nothing that can be specifically done to prevent them from coming back.
- **Neurovascular damage:** can occur during your surgery which results in either a painful spot in the scar or some loss of feeling in the hand. This complication is very rare but may need a further operation to correct.
- **Blood vessel injury:** ganglions at the wrist are often very close to major blood vessels. Damage to the vessel is very rare and can be immediately repaired.
- **Pain:** ongoing discomfort is rare, but possible, following any surgery in the hand.
- **Loss of function:** you will have a temporary loss of function and things will be a little more difficult to do following surgery while the dressings are in place. In rare cases there may be a permanent loss of function.
- **Local Anaesthetic:** very rarely adverse reactions to the local anaesthetic can occur. Also prolonged numbness, pins and needles, pain and nerve damage (usually recovers in the weeks following surgery).

Outpatient Appointment

The initial appointment is with one of our GP screeners. They will discuss your symptoms with you and confirm the diagnosis of your condition. The purpose of the appointment is to discuss treatment options both non-surgical and surgical and agree how to manage your condition. Non surgical treatments (steroid injections and splinting) will be administered at this appointment, however, if they decide surgery is required you will be contacted separately to book the date for the procedure.

What happens if I cannot attend my first appointment?

Please telephone the main patient booking number at Novus Health – 01924 898784 as soon as you are aware that you will not be able to attend. We will then cancel your appointment and re-book for a more convenient time. If you fail to attend your appointment you will be discharged from the service.

What should I bring to my appointment?

Please bring a list of medications that you are currently taking.

The GP Screener will ask you about your problem and how it affects you. Please prepare for this and have any questions ready that concern you.

What happens if I need an onward referral for my condition?

In the majority of cases your entire treatment will be delivered outside of a hospital setting, however, there may be occasions where your condition warrants an onward referral to Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust (MYHT) for specialist treatment or further opinion from a Consultant. There may also be occasions where it is more appropriate for your hand surgery to be conducted under general anaesthetic. If this is the case we have an arrangements for this to be completed at The Spire Methley Park.

Should this be necessary we will make arrangements for the transfer of your care and either MYHT or The Spire will contact you directly to confirm any appointments.

What happens with surgical procedures at Novus Health?

If you require surgery as a result of your appointment this will be booked for a separate occasion and we will contact you by telephone to arrange this. We offer surgical procedures for all 3 minor hand conditions at Sandal Castle Medical Centre, Wakefield. The premises has a purpose built minor surgery clinic, with very good access to all road networks and free parking.

What happens after treatment and surgery?

If you have a non-surgical treatment we will follow-up your progress (via telephone) at 6 weeks and discuss with you the options for further management of your condition.

If you have surgery, we will follow-up your progress immediately post procedure (4-7 days) on the telephone and again 12 weeks later. You will be required to make arrangements for your stitches to be removed at your local GP surgery (after 12-14 days).

Following the successful treatment of your condition you will be discharged from our service back to the care of your GP, however, if you have any complications or concerns regarding your treatment you can contact us directly.

Can I bring a chaperone?

All patients are entitled to have someone else with them during any consultation, examination or procedure. A chaperone can be someone you know (who is over 18 years old) or one of our staff. If you require a member of staff to act as a chaperone, we ask that wherever possible you make this request at the time of booking your appointment so that arrangements can be made and your appointment is not delayed.

What about confidentiality?

We may need to access and record information about your treatment. The information we gain allows us to provide your treatment and can also be used to monitor the quality of care we provide.

Under the Data Protection Act, and as part of good clinical practice, all electronic and paper based information is confidential and stored securely. Your data is always treated confidentially and will only be accessed for your treatment or on a need to know basis.

Our Vision

"To be recognised for our commitment to improving health care services for the local community, developing our range of locally accessed services and excelling in quality, safety and patient experience"

This vision is underpinned by a series of more specific strategic aims

- Improving the safety and clinical quality of our services
- Improving the experience for the patients that we treat, as well as their carers and families
- Developing the range of services we provide and developing the integration of services between primary and secondary care
- Delivering services closer to peoples' homes, with continually improved access to treatment times
- Developing our organisation and workforce
- Continually improving the financial stability of the organisation to enable us to re-invest in new services
- Supporting local GP networks to develop and deliver services

Patients are referred to Novus Health by their GPs using the 'e-Referral' system.

Contact us

If you have any comments, complaints or just want to know more about the services we provide, please contact us on 01924 898784.