

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)

Every guardie's nightmare

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway of bone and ligament in your wrist. The nerve that controls sensation in your fingers and some muscles in the hand passes through this tunnel along with some of the finger tendons. Repeated motion or use of the hand or wrist may cause the tendons to become inflamed and press the nerve against the bone. Pressure on the nerve causes pain and numbness in the hand and fingers. This is known as carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).

The symptoms of CTS include:

- Numbness or tingling in one or both hands that involved all but the little finger.
- Wrist pain that may affect your fingers and radiate up your arm.
- Hand or wrist pain that is often greater at night and early morning.

Carpal tunnel syndrome can be caused by anything that causes swelling against the nerve; for example, a cyst on the tendon or rheumatoid arthritis. Most often, CTS is caused by inflammation due to overuse of the tendons from repetitive finger and hand movements in a bent-wrist position. Colorguard can turn into the breeding ground for CTS, although you cannot "catch it" from someone else. Pregnancy, diabetes, underactive thyroid, and birth control pills increase the risk of CTS.

PREVENTION

- Avoid repetitive hand motions with a bent wrist.
- Take frequent breaks (5 minutes each hour) from repetitive hand motions. Stretch your fingers and thumb and change your grip often.
- Maintain good posture. Avoid rounding your shoulders or slouching.

TREATMENT

- Don't ignore wrist pain. If possible, stop the activity that triggered the problem. If the symptoms decrease, resume the activity gradually with a greater effort to keep the wrist straight.
- If you cannot stop the activity, try to change the way you do it so that your wrist is not stressed.
- Gently warm up your hands before starting work. Do some wrist circles and stretch your fingers and wrists. Repeat every hour.
- Apply ice or a cold pack to the palm side of the wrist.
- A wrist splint that keeps your wrist straight or slightly extended (no more than 15 degrees) may help relieve pain. You can buy a splint in some pharmacies, stores, and in hospital supply stores.
- Begin arm and upper body strengthening exercises.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

- If the pain or numbness is severe and is not relieved by rest, changing positions, ice, or a normal dose of ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- If your hand grip becomes weak.
- If minor symptoms do not improve after one month of prevention and home treatment.
- If any numbness remains after one month of home treatment. Long-term numbness can lead to PERMANENT loss of some hand function.