

Carpal Tunnel Quiz

Laura Butler, OT/R
Occupational Therapist
St. Francis Physical Therapy

Do you have numbness, tingling or pain predominantly on the thumb side of your hand(s)?
Do you frequently awake at night with one or both hands numb or tingling?
Do you participate in activities on a regular basis that are repetitive in nature?
Do you have a weakened grip or find yourself dropping objects often accompanied by discomfort?

If you have answered YES to even just one of these questions you may be at increased risk for developing (or have already developed) carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).

CTS is caused by increased pressure within the carpal tunnel at the wrist where the median nerve passes through to the hand. It is the compression of this nerve that results in the symptoms of CTS: tingling, numbness, pain, sensitivity and thumb muscle weakness. Some factors contributing to CTS include repetitive trauma, injury, posture, pregnancy, systemic disorders (e.g. diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis). If you are frequently experiencing any of these symptoms, consult your doctor. Keep in mind that most people have at least some tingling and numbness now and then, especially at night, and there may be no reason to be alarmed. The best way to prevent this type of discomfort is to avoid sleeping in the fetal position or on your arms.

How is CTS treated? Your doctor may give you a splint much like an over-the-counter-type wrist brace you can get at the drug store. Depending on the severity, surgery may be recommended. However, a much more conservative and yet effective option to utilize is hand therapy. A hand therapist or occupational therapist has specialized training and vast knowledge in the treatment of CTS using various techniques and an individualized treatment program to provide relief and promote recovery to the CTS sufferer. If you are having symptoms of CTS and think hand therapy could benefit you consult your physician or local physical/occupational therapist.