

CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

What You Need to Know

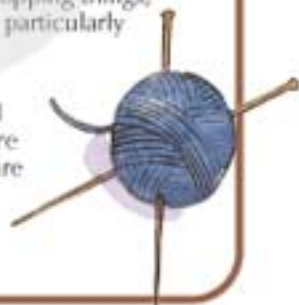
Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common repetitive motion condition that affects the wrists and hands. It develops gradually, as a result of repeatedly holding the hands, wrists and arms in an incorrect position while typing or using a mouse, for example, or during leisure activities that involve awkward wrist and hand positions, such as sewing, knitting, gardening, playing an instrument or woodworking.

With carpal tunnel syndrome, the tendons in the hand and wrist become irritated and begin to swell, pinching the median nerve in the wrist. Tingling, or "pins and needles," and numbness in the fingers and thumb are the earliest symptoms, and they often get worse at night.

- **Listen to your body and change your work habits first.** Pain and discomfort are your body's alarm system. Evaluate the position of your keyboard and mouse, change your typing habits, and maintain proper posture and wrist position while you work. While it may be easy to assume carpal tunnel syndrome is the cause of any pain or discomfort, it's more likely that the pain is a result of mild muscle strain or tendonitis.

- **If the symptoms persist, see your health care provider.** If you change your work habits and maintain proper posture and form while working and you still feel discomfort, that's cause for concern. **Serious symptoms include:** pain when you grip things; numbness, tingling or a "pins and needles" feeling in one or both hands; clumsiness when handling objects or dropping things; or other unusual sensations, particularly in the hands and wrists.

Talk to your health care provider. **Remember:** Painful hand and wrist conditions are easier to prevent than they are to cure, so take any symptoms seriously.



PUT ERGONOMICS TO WORK FOR YOU



Ergonomics is the scientific study of how work affects the body. It simply means fitting the work space (and tools used to do the job) to the person doing the work. An ill-fitting workstation may lead to overreaching, awkward working positions and repetitive motions. Using good ergonomics involves positioning yourself and your equipment, and maintaining proper posture while working.

7-Point Strategy

1. **Adjust your chair, keyboard, mouse and monitor appropriately for you.**
2. **Avoid overreaching and awkward working positions.**
3. **Check your posture.**
4. **Shift your position and gently stretch regularly.**
5. **Exercise regularly.**
6. **Get 7-8 hours of sleep each night and reduce stress.**
7. **Don't ignore numbness or pain.**

Final thought: Good work habits, physical fitness and proper posture can significantly reduce muscle tension from the static routine of keyboarding. Evaluate your workstation comfort periodically to make sure you're doing all that you can to prevent wrist pain and strain.

THE RIGHT TOUCH

KEYBOARD COMFORT TIPS



YOUR HARDWORKING HANDS AND WRISTS



Do you spend long hours working at your computer? Maybe you've never thought about it, but your hard-working hands and wrists may be feeling stiff and tired. Fact is, stretching your hands and wrists frequently helps them relax, rest and stay flexible, and this makes them less likely to become strained or injured.

But that's not all. As automated offices allow us to work faster and more efficiently, more people are spending a majority of their day using a keyboard. And this repetitive motion activity increases the potential for painful conditions if you don't maintain proper form and posture. The tips in this brochure can help.



Good Advice for Desk Jockeys

Millions of people are spending more and more hours hunched over computers — with more potential for repetitive motion conditions. Keyboard users should be on the alert for pain, numbness or other unusual sensations, particularly in the wrists. If symptoms persist, see your health care provider. Meanwhile, here are some tips to increase comfort for keyboarders.

WHAT HELPS

- ✓ Position your keyboard **directly in front** of you while typing.
- ✓ When you type, keep your **shoulders relaxed** and your elbows at your sides.
- ✓ Keep your **hands relaxed** and your fingers gently curved so they "float" over your keyboard and mouse.
- ✓ Keep your **wrists straight**, in line with your forearms, which should be parallel to the floor.
- ✓ Relax your **hands in your lap** when pausing between keystrokes.
- ✓ Alternate tasks to give your hands and wrists a **break from typing** when possible.

WHAT HURTS

- ✗ **Avoid leaning on armrests or wrist pads**, which are designed for only light support.
- ✗ **Don't lean over your keyboard.**
- ✗ **Don't lean on your elbows or rest them against a hard edge**; nerves there can become irritated.
- ✗ **Don't use your computer at odd angles.** Keep your keyboard and monitor directly in front of you, and position them so you don't have to turn your head or crane your neck.
- ✗ **Don't wait for strain before taking a break.**
- ✗ **Don't wear wrist splints while keying**; they may decrease circulation to the wrists or transfer strain to your shoulders.
- ✗ **Avoid activities that overuse your wrists** when away from your keyboard, especially if you feel pain.



A Little About Laptops

Laptop keyboards are small, which may create awkward hand and wrist positioning while typing. If your laptop is your primary computer, consider using a separate keyboard and mouse.

Position the keyboard at elbow height, and keep your wrists straight while keying. Experiment with your table height, chair height and keyboard angle to maintain neutral wrist positions. If you are seated on a side chair or couch, use a pillow to support your arms while keying. This will help you maintain neutral arm, wrist and hand positions.



Check Your Typing Posture

No other position puts as much pressure on your back muscles and spinal column as sitting. Slouching in your chair — whether it's in a car, an airplane, the classroom, an office or your favorite recliner — can cause backache as well as neck, shoulder, head and leg pain. You can ease the strain with proper posture. **When sitting, keep a relaxed, neutral posture:**

- Feet flat on the floor or resting on a footrest.
- Back flat against the chair back with your lower back supported by a lumbar support or cushion.
- Head up, chin tucked in.
- Weight resting evenly on your upper thighs, to help support your spine.



2 Wrist Tension Tamers

To release tension in your hands and fingers, do these exercises about every 20-40 minutes.

Finger Stretch: Make a loose fist then open and gently spread your fingers apart, stretching as far as you comfortably can. Hold for 10 seconds.

Wrist Rotation: With your fingers relaxed, turn your palms up, then completely and slowly rotate them down. Repeat 5 times with each hand.