

Carpal tunnel release

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition where there is increased pressure on the median nerve, which runs through a tight tunnel on the front of your wrist.

If the tunnel becomes too tight it can cause pressure on the nerve, usually resulting in pain or numbness in the thumb, index and middle fingers.

How to get treated form this condition?

If your symptoms are mild, a wrist support worn at night often helps.

A steroid injection near the carpal tunnel can reduce the numbness or pain in most people but the symptoms usually come back after several weeks or months.

What does the operation involve?

The operation can usually be performed under local anaesthetic and sedation. It usually takes about 20 minutes.

Your surgeon will make a small cut on the palm of your hand. They will cut the tight ligament (the flexor retinaculum) that forms the roof of the carpal tunnel. This stops the nerve being compressed.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get relief from pain and numbness in your hand.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Symptoms may improve if there is an underlying cause that is treated. In those people with no underlying cause, symptoms usually continue but can get better or worse for no known reason.

If the compression of the nerve is severe and you do not have any treatment for a long time, the nerve may become permanently damaged. This makes some of the muscles at the base of your thumb waste away and you may get permanent numbness in your hand. A carpal tunnel release operation at this stage may not be able to put right the damage already done.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

What complications can happen?

General complications of any operation

- bleeding
- allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- infection of the surgical site (wound)
- chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- numbness in your thumb, index and middle fingers
- tenderness of the scar
- aching in your wrist
- return of numbness and pain
- severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your hand
- scarring of your skin
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How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day.

Keep your hand raised and bandaged for 2 days. It is important to gently exercise your fingers, elbow and shoulder to prevent stiffness. Remove the bulky dressing after 48hrs and leave the small dressing intact.

You can take regular shower as the dressing is water proof, your doctor will make an appointment for you in 2-week time to remove the stitches.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

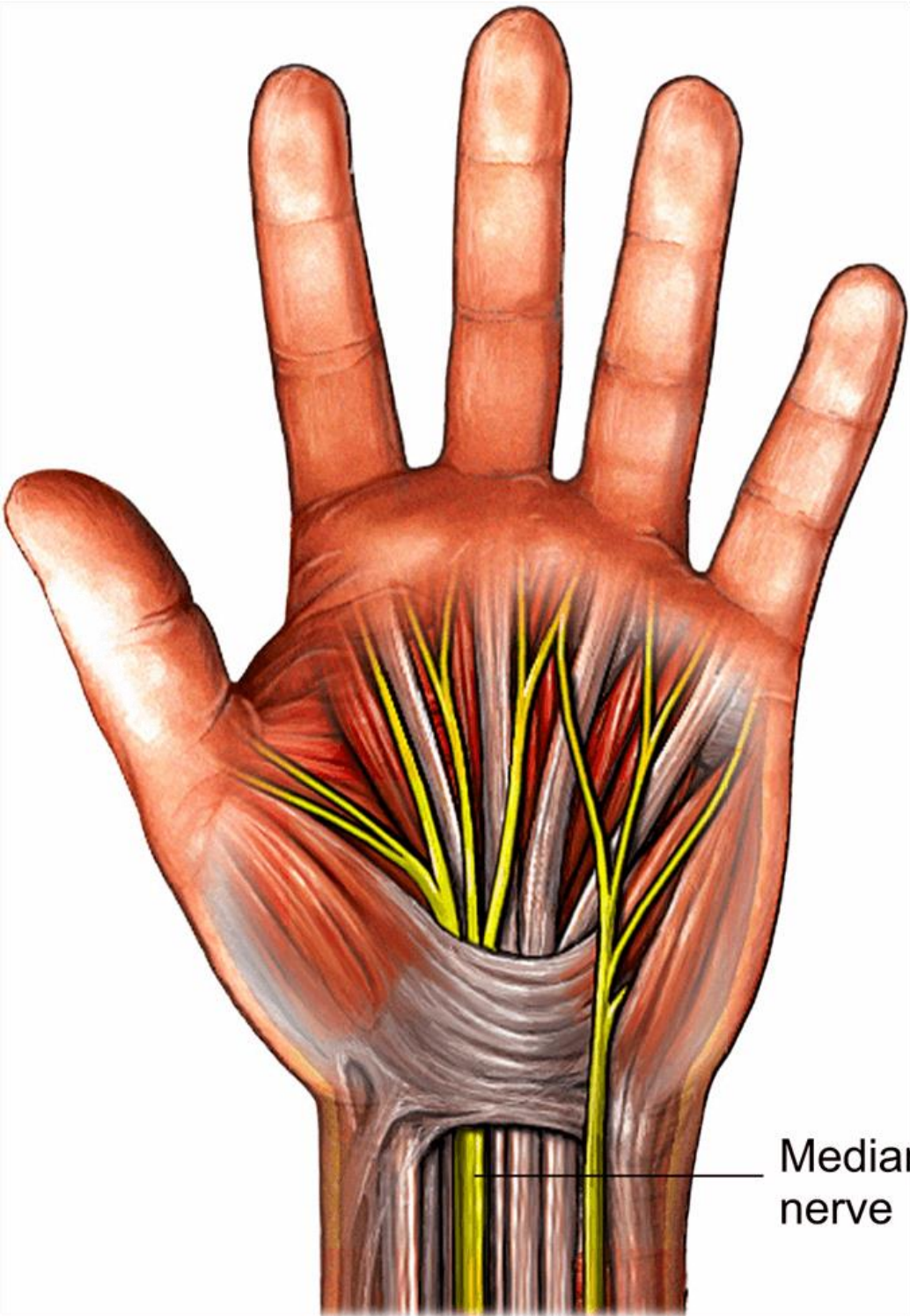
Your symptoms may continue to improve for up to 6 months.

Summary

Carpal tunnel syndrome causes numbness in your thumb, index and middle fingers. A carpal tunnel release should improve your symptoms and prevent permanent nerve damage.

Dr Naveen Agarwal

GENERAL AND LAPAROSCOPIC SURGEON



Median
nerve