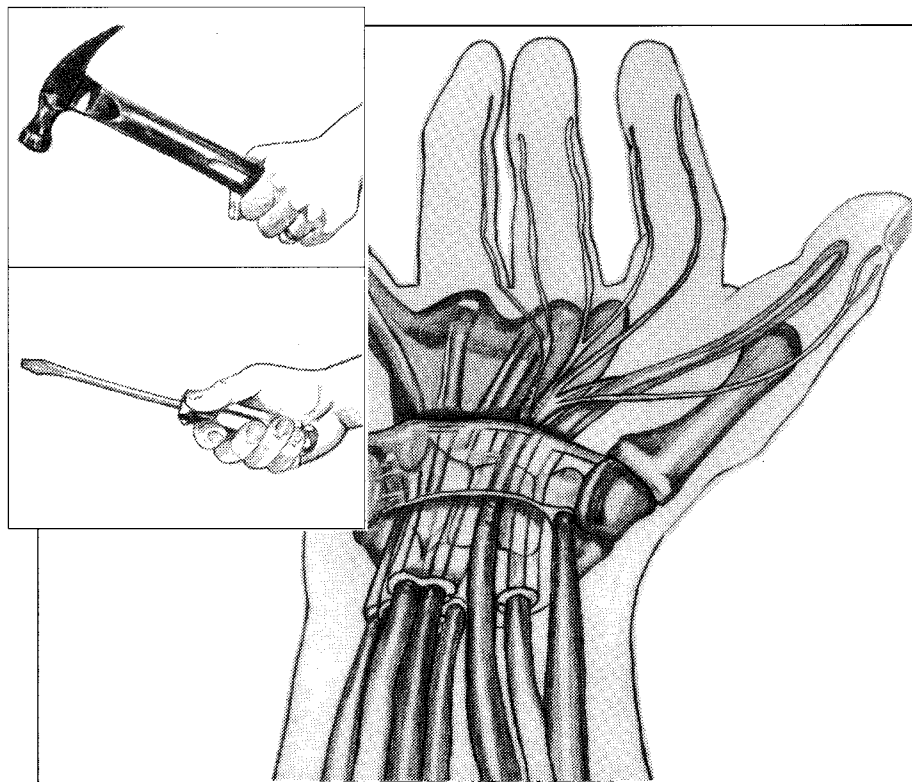


ARE YOU AT RISK FOR CTS?

You extend your hand to greet your new supervisor, but when he shakes it, you feel a sharp, burning pain. All the next day your hand and wrist feel numb.

The diagnosis is a shock. You have carpal tunnel syndrome—CTS for short. CTS is caused by making the same motion over and over in a job. Packers, painters, assembly-line workers, cashiers and people who work at computer keyboards all day are prone to this disease. CTS is one of the leading claims for workers' compensation.



Using just the thumb and index figure to grasp an object can put pressure on your wrist. When practical, use the whole hand.

Why Your Hand Hurts

The carpal tunnel is the bony cavity in your wrist through which nerves and tendons extend to the hand. When you repeat the same hand and wrist movements day in and day out, the strain causes tendons to swell and press on the main nerve of the hand. This persistent nerve irritation can result in pain, numbness and dysfunction, not only in the hand and wrist, but sometimes extending up to the forearm and elbow.

What You Can Do About It

By learning how to modify the way you use your hands, you can minimize the risk of CTS. Here are some ways to prevent the condition:

- ☛ Try to keep your wrist straight. Avoid using your wrist in a twisted position for long periods of time.
- ☛ Reduce repetition. Even simple tasks can eventually cause injury when repeated over and over. Avoid movements that require holding an object the same way for long periods of time.

- ☛ Slow down and use only enough force to control hand tools. When you slow down, your hand has time to recover from each effort.
- ☛ Watch your grip. Using just the thumb and index finger can put pressure on your wrist. When practical, use your whole hand to grasp an object.
- ☛ Give your hands a break from time to time. Alternate the easy and hard jobs or switch hands.
- ☛ Take action early if you notice symptoms; don't wait for them to become unbearable. The earlier you have a professional diagnosis, the more successful the treatment.

New Surgical Technique Speeds CTS Recovery

When diagnosed early, CTS can be treated by stopping the repetitive motion and splinting the wrist. However, more severe cases require surgery to relieve pressure on the nerve.

A new surgical technique allows those with CTS to return to work in about half the time required by conventional surgery. The new procedure uses an endoscopic instrument similar to that used for knee surgery to make a small incision in the patient's wrist instead of in the patient's hand. Patients who have the endoscopic procedure are able to return to work in about 25 days, whereas those who have the conventional open-carpal-tunnel surgery usually require 46 days to recover. 