Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

The *carpal tunnel* is a narrow hollow area in the wrist. It is formed by the wrist bones and ligaments. Nerves, blood vessels, and *tendons* (cord like structures which attach muscle to bone) on the palm side (the side of your hand in the direction your fingers bend) of your hand pass through the carpal tunnel. Repeated wrist motion or certain diseases may cause swelling within the tunnel. (That is why these are called *repetitive trauma* (damage caused by over use) *disorders*. It is also a common problem in late pregnancy.) This swelling pinches the main nerve in the wrist (median nerve) and causes the painful condition called *carpal tunnel syndrome*. A feeling of "pins and needles" may be noticed in the fingers or hand; however, the entire arm may ache from this condition. Carpal tunnel syndrome may clear up by itself. Cortisone injections may help. Sometimes, an operation may be needed to free the pinched nerve. An *electromyogram* (a type of test) may be needed to confirm this *diagnosis* (learning what is wrong). This is a test which measures nerve conduction. The nerve conduction is usually slowed in a carpal tunnel syndrome.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If your caregiver prescribed medication to help reduce swelling, take as directed.
- If you were given a splint to keep your wrist from bending, use it as instructed. It is important to wear the splint at night. Use the splint for as long as you have pain or numbness in your hand, arm or wrist. This may take 1 to 2 months.
- If you have pain at night, it may help to rub or shake your hand, or elevate your hand above the level of your heart (the center of your chest).
- It is important to give your wrist a rest by stopping the activities that are causing the problem. If your *symptoms* (problems) are work-related, you may need to talk to your employer about changing to a job that does not require using your wrist.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Following periods of extended use, particularly strenuous use, apply an ice pack wrapped in a towel to the *anterior* (palm) side of the affected wrist for 20 to 30 minutes. Repeat as needed three to four times per day. This will help reduce the swelling.
- Follow all instructions for follow-up with your caregiver. This includes any orthopedic referrals, physical therapy, and rehabilitation. Any delay in obtaining necessary care could result in a delay or failure of your condition to heal.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are still having pain and numbness following a week of treatment.
- You develop new, unexplained symptoms.
- Your current symptoms are getting worse and are not helped or controlled with medications.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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