Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

You may have carpal tunnel syndrome. This is a common condition. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the tendons, bones, or ligaments in the wrist press against the median nerve as it passes into the hand.

Symptoms can include:

- Intermittent numbness.
- Pain or a tingling sensation in thumb and first two fingers.

The pain may radiate up to the shoulder. There may even be weakness in the hand muscles. The pain is often worse at night and in the early morning. Nerve conduction tests may be used to prove the diagnosis.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is most often due to repeated movements of the hand or wrist.

Other causes can include:

- Prior injuries.
- Diabetes.
- Obesity.
- Smoking.
- Pregnancy. Symptoms that develop during pregnancy often stop when the pregnancy is over.

Treatment includes:

- Splinting - A wrist splint helps prevent movements that irritate the nerve. Splints are especially helpful at night when the symptoms are often worse.
- Ice packs - Cold packs applied to the palm side of the wrist for 20 minutes every 2 hours while awake may give some relief.
- Medication - Medicine to reduce inflammation and pain are often used. Cortisone injections around the nerve may also bring improvement.

Severe cases of carpal tunnel syndrome can require surgery to relieve the pressure on the nerve. This may be necessary if there is evidence of weakness or decreased sensation in your hand, or if your symptoms do not improve with conservative treatment. See your caregiver for follow-up to be certain your condition is improving.

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