



# Body Awareness Physical Therapy

## The Body Beat

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### Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Many of us have had the experience of tingling in the fingers following a long workday or hard night's sleep, but is this carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is a condition brought on by increased pressure at the wrist. The carpal tunnel is a bracelet formed by bones and ligaments just below the wrist at the heel of the hand. Nine finger tendons, the median nerve, arteries and veins pass through the tunnel. The bracelet is not able to expand, therefore pressure can build in the tunnel. Pressure can increase in several ways: swelling of the tissue surrounding the tendons, called tenosynovitis; joint fractures/dislocations or arthritis may narrow the tunnel; keeping the wrist bent for prolonged periods of time also compresses the tunnel. Fluid retention with pregnancy may produce carpal tunnel symptoms, which often dissipate following delivery. Oral contraceptives, diabetes and thyroid conditions are also associated with carpal tunnel syndrome. It is extremely important

for your doctor to get a complete medical history to treat the primary reason for your symptoms.

The most common symptoms of CTS are usually pain, numbness, tingling, or a combination of the three. The numbness or tingling most often occurs in the thumb, index and middle fingers. These symptoms often occur at night, but may be noticed with daily activities such as reading the newspaper or driving. Patients may notice a weaker grip, occasional clumsiness, and may drop things. In severe cases, sensation may be permanently lost and the muscles at the base of the thumb slowly shrink.

CTS can often be treated successfully without surgery. Alternatives may include identifying and treating medical conditions, changing the patterns of use of the hands and splinting the wrist in a straight position to reduce pressure on the median nerve. Wearing splints at night may relieve the symptoms that interfere with sleep. Anti-inflammatory medication taken by mouth or injected into the carpal

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tunnel may help eliminate symptoms.

When symptoms do not improve following aggressive physical therapy and retraining, surgery may be required to avoid permanent nerve damage. Pressure is relieved by cutting the ligament that forms the roof of the tunnel on the palm side of the hand. Symptoms following surgery may disappear quickly, however, in severe cases they may never completely resolve.

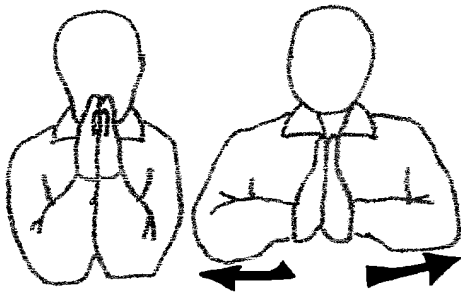
Prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome is well documented with changing or interruption of activities prone to cause irritations. Your physical therapist can help you to determine possible problematic positions to avoid the unnecessary pains of CTS. See our Q'n'A section to learn specific preventative measures you can take to change symptoms today.

# Q'N'A

Your questions answered by the Licensed Physical Therapists of Body Awareness Physical Therapy.

**Q** : What muscles can I stretch to avoid unnecessary tightness associated with carpal tunnel syndrome?

**A** : Many people develop tightness throughout their forearm flexor muscles. These muscles are on the downward side of the forearm when the palm faces the floor. Forearm flexors are responsible for gripping and typing activities, which frequently are performed many hours of the day. The stretch shown below is good to do during the day. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, pain-free and repeat 3 times.



**Q** : Why do I wake in the middle of the night with severe pain in my hands?

**A** : One of the symptoms of carpal tunnel is the inability to sleep through the night due to pain. This pain occurs from prolonged wrist flexion while sleeping. The position creates pressure in the tunnel and therefore on the median nerve. This pressure on the nerve results in pain which causes you to wake from your sleep. To eliminate this problem try sleeping in wrist braces that do not allow the wrist to bend. Make sure to also make an appointment to see a physician that specializes in hands to ensure that your symptoms are not causing permanent nerve damage.

*Instructions for Carpal Tunnel Stretch*  
Start with your elbows, forearms and hands touching. Raise and separate your elbows, keeping the heels of your hands together and the wrist angles equal on both sides.

## BODY AWARENESS GRADUATE OF THE MONTH

### Graduate of the Month: Tim Frydendall

Tim injured his knee while running on the track team last year. He thought that he had sprained the knee and that it would recover over time. Unfortunately, many months later after an MRI he discovered that he had torn



the meniscus in the knee. Following surgery he was in a straight leg cast for 2 months. Tim came to therapy with little knee motion. He worked extremely hard and today he is running again and ready for track season!

# Community Corner

## Prevent Pain At Home And In The Workplace

The internet is a great source for information regarding ergonomics. Although these websites offer extensive information, it is always important to visit your doctor if you are having pain that increases or persists. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about modifying your home and work space to prevent and relieve symptoms.

A sample of ergonomics websites

The pain relief innovators  
[www.imakproducts.com](http://www.imakproducts.com)

Devoted to all things ergonomic  
[www.ergoboy.com](http://www.ergoboy.com)

Functional solutions  
[www.beabletodo.com](http://www.beabletodo.com)

Have a question for our **Q’N’A** column or a suggestion on what you would like to see in the Body Awareness *Body Beat*?

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# Healthy Hints

Ergonomics for proper typing:

1. Wrists should not rest on anything. The “wrist-rest” devices give you a place to rest hands when *pausing* from typing.
2. Do not pound the keys. Using a light touch decreases inflammation around the finger tendons keeping the carpal tunnel free from swelling.
3. Align your wrists. Fingers should be in a straight line with the forearm, as viewed from above.



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