


Wrist Care: Preventing Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

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Wrist Care: Preventing Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

If you spend a lot of time doing activities that involve forceful or repetitive hand or wrist movement or use of vibrating equipment, you have an increased risk for carpal tunnel syndrome. These activities can include driving, working with small instruments, knitting, or using a sander. You can reduce your risk—and any hand pain or weakness you may already have—by taking a few simple steps.

- Many health conditions and diseases make you more likely to get carpal tunnel symptoms. But if you exercise, stay at a healthy weight, control other health conditions such as arthritis and diabetes, and avoid smoking, you can help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Arranging your activity and work space using ergonomic guidelines can help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome. Office ergonomics focuses on how a workstation is set up, including the placement of your desk, computer monitor, paperwork, chair, and associated tools, such as a computer keyboard and mouse. The same ideas can help you arrange your position for other daily activities.
- Proper body mechanics are key to preventing carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Evaluate your daily routine for activities that increase your risk of carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Take frequent breaks from activities to rest, stretch, change positions, or alternate with another activity.



How can you prevent carpal tunnel syndrome?



How can you prevent carpal tunnel syndrome?

Don't wait till you have symptoms to take preventive measures. Increase your awareness of how you use your hands and equipment throughout the day, and make some changes. Many different kinds of activity can cause carpal tunnel syndrome.

Use an ergonomically correct workstation setup and posture (See figure in appendix) . You can adjust your working environment and how you use it. You can also use a similar setup for other work areas, such as where you do your hobbies or work with hand tools.

When setting up your work area:

- Center your work in front of you, as low as possible without touching your legs (your forearms are parallel to the floor or slightly lowered). If you work while standing, have your work surface at about waist height.
- Keep your hands and wrists in line with your forearms. For example, if you work at a keyboard, tilt it to help keep this alignment. Use proper hand and wrist position (See figure in appendix) for manual tasks.
- Hold your elbows close to your sides.
- Avoid leaning on the heel of your hand or your wrist.
- Take little breaks every 10 to 15 minutes. Use a reminder alarm if needed.
- Do stretching exercises (See figure in appendix) every 20 to 60 minutes.

Consider trying a different tool or grip. Many people benefit from using a split, V-shaped keyboard. If possible, try one for at least a week. One style may work well for you while another doesn't. When using other equipment, try changing the way you hold the tool. You may also be able to switch hands now and then when using some tools.

Consider trying wrist splints. If you have carpal tunnel symptoms and have trouble training your wrists to stay straight, try wearing wrist splints for temporary relief. These splints (See figure in appendix) are not meant to be worn over a long period of time. But wearing them whenever you are sleeping can help you manage carpal tunnel syndrome over the long term.

Credits for Wrist Care: Preventing Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

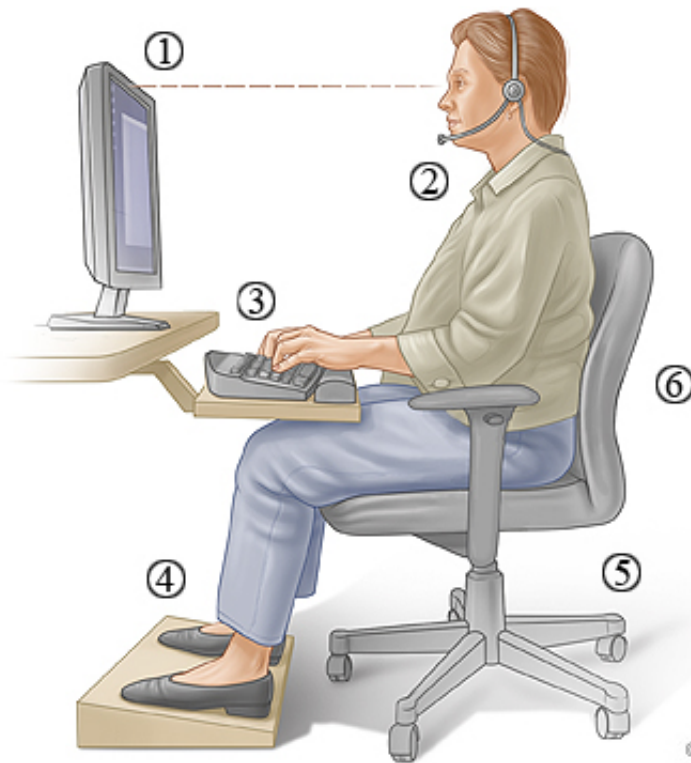
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Appendix

Topic Images

Ergonomic Workstation



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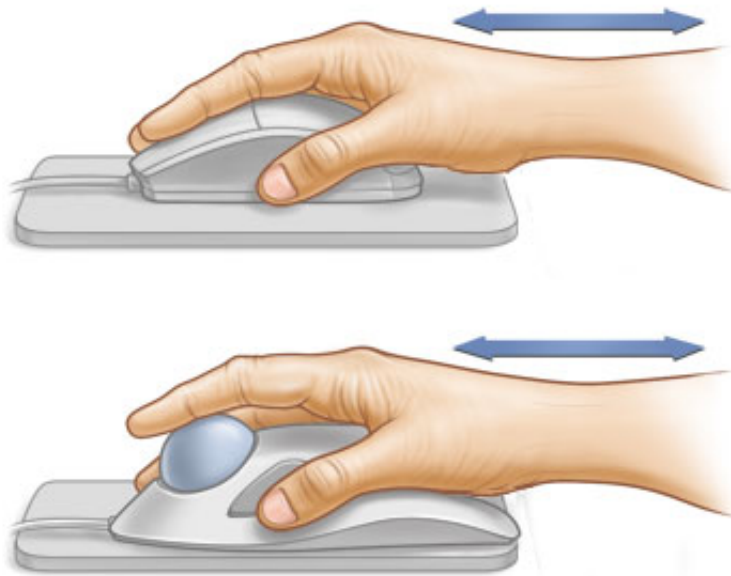
This is one example of an ergonomically correct workstation. Some people would be more comfortable with slight adjustments such as tilting the keyboard a bit or removing the armrests from the chair. But this picture shows many of the important pieces of a good workstation.

- The **top of the monitor screen** is at eye level.
- A **telephone headset** helps you to avoid awkward positions while talking and doing other tasks, such as typing.
- A **wrist pad** at the bottom of the keyboard helps keep the wrists in a neutral, almost straight position during brief rests from typing. Wrist pads are not designed to be used while you type. But some people find the pads helpful even when they are using their keyboard or mouse. When you type or use your mouse, try raising your forearms a little so your wrists are in a neutral position and your arms and hands can move freely. If you have arm rests on your chair, you may be able to adjust them so your forearms are parallel to the floor and your wrists are neutral. You may want to alternate between resting your wrists on the pads and raising them up. If you use a wrist pad, it's best to rest your palm or the heel of your hand on the support, rather than your wrist.
- If your feet do not rest flat on the floor when you sit in your chair, a **footrest** raises your feet to reduce pressure on the lower back.
- **Armrests** are adjusted so that the elbows are close to the side of the body and bent at an angle between 90 and 100 degrees.
- An **adjustable chair** has a height adjustment to allow the feet to rest on the floor or on a footrest. Also the back of the chair adjusts for different positions.

Sitting with the ears directly above the shoulders, which in turn are over the hips, helps prevent back strain. Placing a lumbar pillow or roll against the small of the back provides extra support.

Figure

Proper Hand and Wrist Position



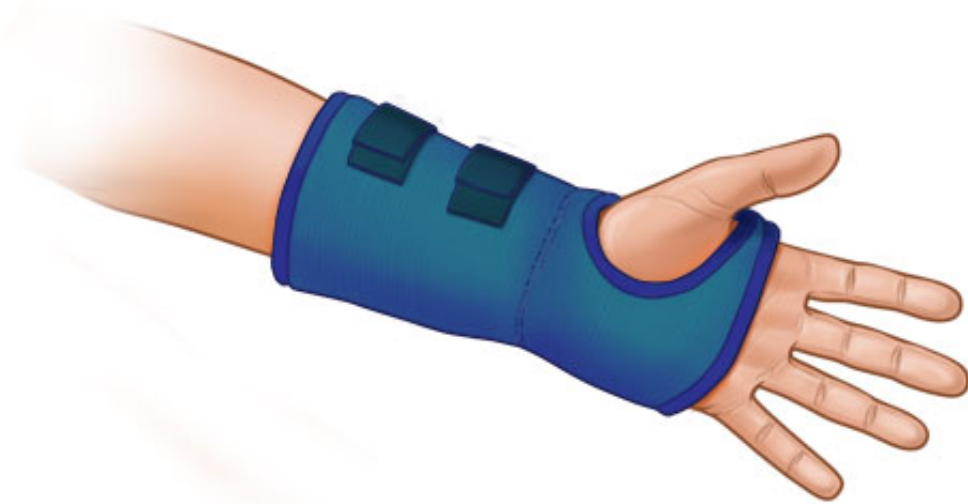
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The best position for mouse and trackball use is with your wrist neutral. Your wrist should not bend to tilt your hand up or out to the side.

The same idea will help when you do other activities that require you to use your fingers and hands in the same way over and over. As much as you can, keep your wrists neutral.

Figure

Wrist Splint



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A wrist splint can be worn to support the wrist while holding it firm and still (immobilize it).

A good wrist splint should:

- Be comfortable, washable, durable, and easy to remove.
- Keep the wrist in a neutral position. The wrist is generally in a neutral position when you are holding a glass of water, with the thumb in line with the forearm.
- Restrict wrist movements while allowing fine hand movements.

Splints are available without a prescription from a drugstore, or with a prescription from an orthopedic or medical supply house. Physical and occupational therapists can custom-fit splints made from lightweight materials. This often reduces the clumsiness of wearing a splint.

These are general stretches for the wrists and arms. Stretching may help prevent arm problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Do not do any stretch or movement that is uncomfortable or painful.

Warm-up stretches

- Rotate your wrist up, down, and from side to side. Repeat 4 times.
- Stretch your fingers far apart, relax them, then stretch them again. Repeat 4 times.
- Stretch your thumb by pulling it back gently, holding it, and then releasing it. Repeat 4 times.

Figure 4

Prayer stretch



1. Start with your palms together in front of your chest just below your chin.
2. Slowly lower your hands toward your waistline, keeping your hands close to your stomach and your palms together, until you feel a mild to moderate stretch under your forearms.
3. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Figure 5

Wrist flexor stretch



1. Extend your arm in front of you with your palm up.
2. Bend your wrist, pointing your hand toward the floor.
3. With your other hand, gently bend your wrist farther until you feel a mild to

- moderate stretch in your forearm.
4. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Figure 6

Wrist extensor stretch



1. Extend your arm in front of you with your palm down.
2. Bend your wrist, pointing your hand toward the floor.
3. With your other hand, gently bend your wrist farther until you feel a mild to moderate stretch in your forearm.
4. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



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