

Carpal Tunnel Release Instructions

1. Although nighttime symptoms are often relieved immediately, constant numbness or weakness are due to nerve damage and may remain. These resolve very gradually and recovery may be incomplete. Maximum improvement may take 6 to 12 months. Occasionally, the numbness may be more obvious after surgery because the pain and tingling are improved.
2. After carpal tunnel surgery it is very important to make a full fist and fully straighten the fingers ten times an hour while awake. This prevents swelling and stiffness and will help prevent scar tissue from forming around the nerve. The motion will press fluid out of the fingers and prevent swelling and stiffness. Elevation of the hand is also important after carpal tunnel surgery. The hand should be kept at a level higher than your heart to reduce swelling. You may use an ice pack or frozen peas on your wrist for the first few days. Avoiding direct skin contact, leave the pack on 20 minutes and remove for 20 minutes repeating 4-5 times a day. Avoid flexing the wrist and the fingers at the same time as this compresses your nerve. You may use the hand for light activities such as eating, dressing and personal care. Driving is allowed once you feel strong enough to safely grip the steering wheel and aren't taking narcotics.
3. Your dressing should be kept clean and dry. If the wrap feels too tight you may loosen it and rewrap it. A plastic bag may be used to cover the hand while bathing. By keeping the hand fully elevated, it is possible to take a brief shower without getting the bandages wet. You may remove the surgical dressing 3 days after surgery and apply Band-Aids to the incision. Do NOT submerge the incision in water for 2-3 weeks.
4. After an operation using local anaesthetic, it is common to experience numbness and tingling in the hand for 8 to 24 hours after surgery. A pain medication prescription will be provided although many patients only need one or two pills. The most important aspect of pain relief after hand surgery is strict elevation of the hand. You may also use over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication (motrin / aleve) to reduce swelling and pain for the first few weeks.
5. Sutures are usually removed ten to fifteen days after hand surgery. After suture removal you should begin a scar massage program. Vitamin E oil should be rubbed briskly into the scar for five minutes, twice a day. The oil may be picked up at a local drug store without a prescription. You may also use the oil from a capsule of Vitamin E. The massage program should be continued for at least 6 weeks. A thickened and tender scar will frequently develop four weeks after carpal tunnel surgery. You will notice pain primarily with direct pressure on the scar that will slowly resolve over several months. Return to golf and hand sports is usually possible at 6 to 8 weeks. Impact-loading to the palm should be avoided for at least 6 weeks. A padded glove may be helpful.
6. Make sure an appointment has been scheduled for you with your doctor in 10-14 days after surgery.