

Patient Information Leaflet

Carpal Tunnel Release

Produced by: Orthopaedic Department

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If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Quality Team, telephone 01983 534850, who will advise you.

You are coming into hospital to undergo a Carpal Tunnel release.

This operation is carried out to treat a condition known as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. This information booklet has been designed with YOU in mind. We hope it will help alleviate any worries you may have about your forthcoming operation.

It is natural to be apprehensive about any operation – we understand this. So, if you have any particular worries let the staff know so we can help.

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

The carpal tunnel is a space in the wrist, through which the nerves and tendons pass from the forearm to the hand. The nerve known as the Median nerve is compressed within the tunnel and this causes symptoms of pain, pins and needles, numbness, and occasionally even weakness in the hand, especially the thumb, index and middle finger. The pain can sometimes be felt in the forearm and even in the upper arm. It tends to occur more often during the night. It can be associated with pregnancy or arthritis but often no specific cause is found.

The operation

The operation involves an incision, usually 3-4 cms long, over the front of the wrist. It releases the tight roof of the tunnel (the flexor retinaculum) and creates more space for the nerve, thus relieving the symptoms. If performed under a local anaesthetic you will be awake during the operation, but will feel no pain as the area of the operation is numbed by the local anaesthetic. The local anaesthetic is injected about ten minutes before the operation commences. Just before the skin is prepared with antiseptic, a tourniquet cuff may be placed around the upper arm to keep blood away from the operation site, thereby making the operation quicker and more accurate. The tourniquet cuff will remain inflated for approximately 15 minutes, which is the usual length of the procedure. Alternatively, the operation may, sometimes, be performed under General Anaesthesia.

What are the risks?

Complications are rare. Your hand should not be too painful, but there will be local swelling. The wound often remains tender and swollen for several weeks. There is a small risk of wound infection. If the nerve has been compressed severely and / or for a long time, it is possible that scar tissue will have formed within the nerve, preventing full recovery.

After the operation

You may be allowed home the same day in a bulky hand dressing. You cannot drive whilst your hand is in the bandage. This bandage will be reduced by the practice nurse 48 hours after your operation, and your stitches will be removed 10 days after your operation, again by the practice nurse. You are encouraged to use the hand as normally as possible after the dressing has been reduced (while keeping the wound dry until the stitches are removed). Follow-up in the out-patient clinic is not normally necessary.

Recovery

The recovery period is unpredictable; it depends on the severity of the nerve compression and the length of time for which the nerve has been compressed. Occasionally the compression is so severe or long-standing that recovery will not occur despite adequate decompression. After surgery the pins and needles are usually the first symptom to improve. The numbness can take months or even longer to improve. The scar can remain sore and swollen for several weeks and occasionally it can even take up to six months to settle. There is a small possibility that the original symptoms can recur after successful decompression.

Valuables should not be brought into the hospital. If patients have to bring in valuable items they should ask a nurse to store them safely and request a receipt for the items. You may not be able to have the valuable items returned if the time of discharge from hospital is out of hours.

We are sorry but the Trust cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items not given for safe keeping.

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues through NHS interactive available through Sky TV or online at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: 111

We Value Your Views On Our Service

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust
St Mary's Hospital
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 5TG

You can also share any concerns you have about our services with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 03000 61 61 61 or at enquires@cqc.org.uk

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.

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