



ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL  
MELBOURNE

# Carpal Tunnel Surgery

Caring for your hand after carpal tunnel surgery



## **What is carpal tunnel syndrome?**

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition that affects the hand and wrist. It occurs when a nerve, called the median nerve, becomes compressed or squeezed at the wrist. This compression can cause symptoms such as pain, numbness, tingling, and weakness in the hand and fingers.

## **What is carpal tunnel decompression?**

Carpal tunnel decompression, also known as carpal tunnel release surgery, is a surgical procedure performed to reduce the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome. During the procedure, the surgeon makes a cut over your wrist to create more space for the compressed median nerve.

## **What to expect after carpal tunnel decompression**

You may experience pain after carpal tunnel surgery in the hand and wrist area. Using over the counter pain medication or applying a cool pack to the area can help.

Swelling to the hand and wrist may continue for many weeks after carpal tunnel surgery. Elevating the hand can reduce swelling.

You may still experience carpal tunnel symptoms after the surgery, symptoms are expected to decrease with time.

## **Wound care after carpal tunnel decompression**

Stitches are removed around 14 days after surgery. You may have dissolvable stitches which, depending on the type of material used can take anywhere from a week to several weeks to dissolve.

Keep your wound clean and dry for the first 10-14 days or until the wound has healed.

You may then begin to wash your scar (and dissolvable stitches) with soap and water and you do not need to apply any dressing. Avoid soaking the hand if dissolvable stitches are present. If you have increased swelling, redness or heat around your wound see your GP or contact the Specialist Clinic, since these symptoms could indicate infection.

## **Scar care after carpal tunnel decompression**

Scar massage after carpal tunnel decompression surgery can be beneficial in reducing scar tissue formation. When your wound has healed, you can start massaging your scar with moisturiser. Apply light to moderate pressure, but avoid discomfort. Aim for 3 times a day, this will help soften your scar and decrease sensitivity.

**Better and fairer care. Always.**

### **Dissolvable stitch care after carpal tunnel decompression**

After your wound has healed start washing the scar with soap and water. Avoid soaking the hand. After washing the scar apply a water based moisturiser to the stitches regularly.

You may complete scar massage over dissolvable stitches.

Dissolvable stitches can take many weeks to dissolve. If the dissolvable stitches are causing irritation, they can be removed. Please contact your GP for advice on removal.

### **Using your hand after carpal tunnel decompression**

After surgery you may move your fingers and thumb, which can help reduce stiffness. Once your post-operative dressing has been removed at about 1 week after surgery, you may start moving your wrist.

Gradually increase your movement of your hand and wrist until you have regained your normal movement.

Avoid heavy lifting, repetitive movements or activities which put strain on your wrist for the first few weeks. Gradually return to your normal activities, as you feel able to.

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### **Useful exercises after carpal tunnel surgery**

Exercise within comfortable limits until you regain your normal movement.



### **Useful sources of information**

[www.healthdirect.gov.au/caring-for-your-sutures](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/caring-for-your-sutures)

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/carpal-tunnel-syndrome](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/carpal-tunnel-syndrome)

### **Contact details**

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