

Carpal tunnel care clinic

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

Your GP has referred you to the carpal tunnel care clinic. This leaflet explains what carpal tunnel syndrome is, what the treatment options are and what will happen at your first appointment. This information will help you prepare for your appointment and we hope it answers any questions you or those who care for you may have. If you have any further questions, please write them down and bring them with you to your appointment.

What is the carpal tunnel care clinic?

The aim of this clinic is to provide a smooth and efficient pathway for people with suspected carpal tunnel syndrome. We carry out a clinical assessment, nerve conduction studies and a specialist assessment all in one appointment. If appropriate, we will also schedule you for surgery, which we aim to offer within two months of your first appointment.

On the day of your appointment

You are welcome to bring a friend or relative with you to your appointment, however, due to limited space they may be asked to wait in the waiting area during some of your assessments and investigations. Please note we do not have crèche or childcare facilities so please arrange childcare for that day. If you do not arrange childcare we will have to reschedule your appointment.

Please bring a list of your medications with you.

Your appointment letter tells you what time to come to Charing Cross Hospital. When you arrive, please follow the signs for the **fracture clinic**, where we are situated. There is a map on page 5 of this leaflet. When you arrive please check-in either at the kiosk or by going to the reception desk.

We will let you know what the wait time is (if any) when you arrive and we will update you regularly.

Who will I see at my appointment?

1. The nurse will carry out a basic assessment to measure your height and weight.

2. The registrar (junior doctor) will review your medical history / symptoms and assess your hand. This will take around 15 minutes.

3. The hand therapist will carry out nerve conduction tests. This involves passing an electric current along the path of the nerves in your hand and wrist to see if / how they work. This will take around 15 minutes.

4. The doctor (the consultant responsible for your care) will:

- review your test results
- diagnose your condition
- determine the best treatment option with you

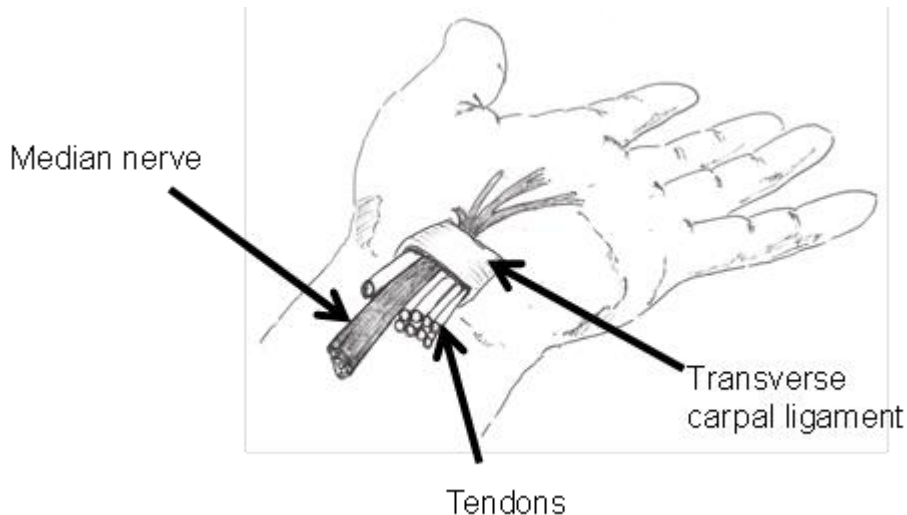
This part of your appointment will take 15 minutes.

If a steroid injection is recommended this will be performed on the day.

If you need surgery we will arrange this for two months' time. We will take MRSA swabs (from your nose or mouth) before you leave the clinic.

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition where the median nerve is compressed as it passes through a short tunnel at the wrist. This tunnel is formed by small bones (the carpal bones) underneath and on the sides and a thick ligament (transverse carpal ligament) across the top. This tunnel also houses the tendons which bend the fingers and thumb. The median nerve carries messages about touch, temperature and pain between the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers and the brain. In addition, the median nerve supplies the small muscles which control the thumb.



What are the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome?

- a feeling of pins and needles
- numbness
- pain
- dry skin
- muscle weakness

Symptoms may be brought on when using the hands in an elevated (raised) position, such as driving or doing your hair. In the early stages of carpal tunnel syndrome these symptoms might be more common at night.

Sometimes people have difficulty performing fine tasks such as doing up buttons or are more likely to drop things.

People often report that shaking their hand helps to relieve symptoms.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

Most commonly the cause of carpal tunnel syndrome is unknown.

Known causes and contributory factors include:

- repetitive movements at the wrist
- diabetes

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- fluid retention e.g. during pregnancy
 - underactive thyroid
 - rheumatoid arthritis
 - gout - a type of arthritis where crystals form inside and around joints
 - lipomas - soft, fatty lumps that grow under your skin
 - acromegaly - a rare condition where the body produces too much growth hormone and body tissues / bones grow more quickly
 - amyloidosis - a build-up of an abnormal protein in organs and tissues which makes it difficult for them to work properly
 - excessive alcohol consumption (more than 14 units a week)
 - wrist fractures or dislocations

You are more at risk of carpal tunnel syndrome if you:

- are overweight
- are pregnant
- do work or hobbies that involve repeatedly bending your wrist or grip hard, such as using vibrating tools
- have another illness, such as arthritis or diabetes
- have a parent, brother or sister with carpal tunnel syndrome
- have previously injured your wrist

How is carpal tunnel syndrome diagnosed?

The condition is diagnosed on a basis of understanding your symptoms and an assessment of your nerve conduction studies.

What can I do to help relieve my symptoms?

- Try not to over-use your wrist by excessive squeezing, gripping, wringing, etc.
- Avoid holding the wrist in a flexed or bent position for long periods
- Avoid activity with vibration, such as hoovering and vibrating tools. Wear padded gloves for cycling
- Manage your underlying medical conditions

Treatment options

There are different treatments available. Which one you are offered will depend on the severity of your symptoms and the results of your nerve conduction tests.

Wrist splint

Removable splints worn at night that aim to keep the wrist at a neutral angle without applying force over the carpal tunnel to rest the nerve. It may take some time to see the benefit of a night splint so we recommend at least a six-week trial.

Steroid injection

This is an injection into or near to the carpal tunnel which can ease symptoms in 75 per cent of cases. However, symptoms can return afterwards and for some people the injection will not help.

Surgery

This is usually recommended for continued / severe symptoms. It is the best chance for a long-term cure. This involves a twenty-minute procedure which is typically done under local anaesthetic as a day case, meaning you can go home the same day. We make a small cut in the palm of the hand and release the ligament which is causing pressure over the nerve. The skin is closed with several stitches and a light dressing is applied, followed by a bulky bandage. You can remove the bulky bandage three days after your surgery but keep the small dressing in place for two weeks. You should arrange to see your GP or practice nurse two weeks after surgery to remove the stitches.

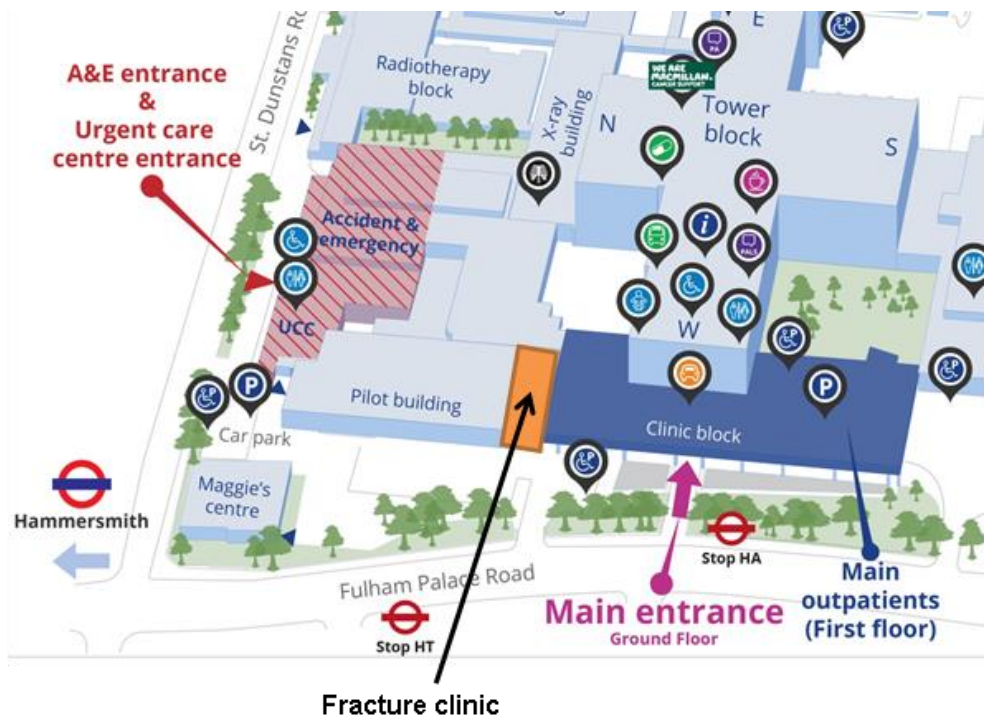
The wound takes two weeks to heal and most people are expected to be able to use their hand as normal after six weeks. Most patients recover from surgery without further problems.

If you are scheduled for surgery we will provide you with a leaflet about the operation and what to expect afterwards.

Contact details

Email: imperial.carpaltunnelclinic@nhs.net

Find us in the fracture clinic on the ground floor, Charing Cross Hospital



Further resources

- The NHS website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/
- A [video animation](#) of what carpal tunnel syndrome is and what causes it

Feedback about our service

We are constantly striving to improve the service we provide to our patients. Before leaving the clinic, we will ask you to fill out an evaluation form which takes two minutes to complete.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department
Fourth floor, Salton House
St Mary's Hospital
Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM