Detected carpal tunnel syndrome

Typing, knitting, or needlework; carpentry work or cutting — if you engage in any of these activities on a daily basis, for work or pleasure, you could be at risk for developing carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), a repetitive strain injury caused by a pinched nerve in the wrist.

Computer keyboard use is one source of the increase in work-related repetitive strain injuries in recent years. Other jobs requiring repetitive wrist or finger motions, such as those in meat, fish, and poultry processing, construction trades, electronics assembly, logging and sawmill operation, supermarket cashiering and scanning, and some activities of hairdressers, farm and factory workers, and mechanics, also are responsible.

A study in the July 14, 1999, issue of JAMA reports that pain, numbness, and tingling in the thumb and first 3 fingers — the primary symptoms of CTS — are common in the general population of Sweden. The researchers believe that as many as 1 in 5 people with these symptoms could have CTS.

The good news is that about 90% of people with mild CTS can recover fully with appropriate treatment.

Prevention:
- Stretch or flex your arms and fingers before beginning to work and take frequent breaks to flex and stretch.
- Alternate tasks, if possible, to reduce the amount of repetitive movements.
- Modify or change your daily activities (including work and hobbies) that put pressure on your wrists.
- Modify your work environment if possible. A healthy computer workstation includes an adjustable keyboard table and chair, and a wrist rest.

For more information:
- National Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse
  1 AMS Circle
  Bethesda, MD 20892-3675
  301/495-4484
  301/565-2966 (TTY)
- National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health
  800/356-4674
  E-mail: pubstaff@cdc.gov or www.cdc.gov/niosh
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
  Self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope to:
  Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
  American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
  P.O. Box 2058
  Des Plaines, IL 60017 or www.aaos.org

Inform yourself:
To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, check out the AMA’s Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, American Academy of Neurology, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, AMA’s Encyclopedia of Medicine

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