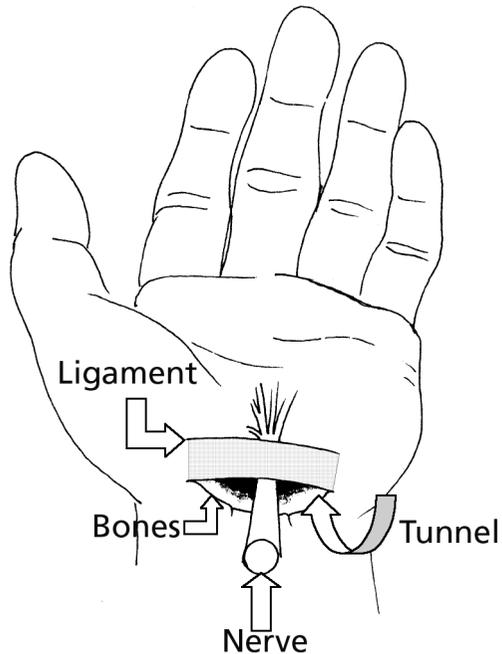


## Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when there is too much pressure on a large nerve (the median nerve) at the wrist.

The diagram shows how the nerve passes through a 'tunnel' formed by the carpal bones and a broad ligament.



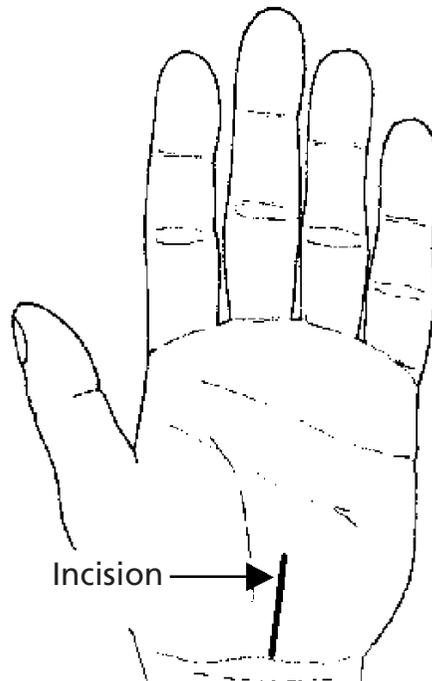
Surgery involves cutting this ligament to relieve pressure on the nerve. It is recommended when simpler measures have not worked and the problem is not improving naturally.

Without surgery the nerve may be increasingly damaged. Then it recovers poorly after surgery, so it is better to operate before too much damage has occurred.

However, even when damage is severe, surgery may be worthwhile to relieve pain and to prevent further deterioration in the nerve. We will tell you if we think you have severe damage.

## The Operation:

- The operation is performed under local anaesthesia. This means you will have an injection at your wrist so that you do not feel pain during the operation. You will not be put to sleep.
- A cut is made over the carpal tunnel (see diagram). The skin is then stitched.
- The operation takes only a short time.
- You will be able to leave hospital an hour or so after surgery.



## After The Operation:

**Pain:** is usually relieved by simple painkillers, eg: Paracetamol.

**Stitches:** are removed in Clinic about 10 days after surgery. Try to keep the dressing dry until the stitches are removed. Dressings are not usually needed after this.

**Recovery:** it is safe and good to move the fingers and use the hand in simple ways immediately after surgery. Episodes of painful numbness usually settle quickly. If you have reached the stage where some tingling or loss of feeling is always present, this may take some time to improve. In a few cases feeling never returns to normal.

**Driving:** you should not drive until you can turn the steering wheel firmly and confidently, usually 7-14 days after surgery.

**Work:** light tasks are possible within a few days. Most people have returned to work by 4 weeks.

## Are there risks?

**Scar discomfort:** tenderness usually settles in a few weeks. In about 1 in 10 people discomfort persists for many months. This may take the form of tenderness, burning pain or other unpleasant sensations at or near the scar. No treatment is effective but it eventually settles.

**Weakness:** most people notice slight loss of strength for about 6 months.

**Continuing numbness or tingling:** minor episodes of tingling are common after surgery. If there is severe damage to the nerve before surgery there may be little improvement afterwards. Most people make a very good recovery.

**Stiffness:** severe stiffness is a rare problem. A small number of people react abnormally to surgery of any sort in the hand. In the weeks afterwards the hand becomes increasingly swollen, stiff and painful. This is a poorly understood condition (complex regional pain syndrome) which is difficult to treat and takes months to settle. Loosening of tight bandages and regular exercise of the fingers beginning soon after surgery are the most important ways to prevent it.

If you think your bandage is too tight please phone the Clinic at Arrowe Park Hospital using the number given on the next page.

**Recurrence** is rare.

**Infection** occurs after 1-2% of operations. It should be suspected if pain and swelling increase a few days after the operation.

In this case please phone the  
Fracture Clinic  
at Arrowe Park Hospital  
**0151 604 7069**  
between  
9 and 11am Mon – Fri  
or  
contact your GP.

This leaflet is available in large print,  
Braille and on tape.  
Please contact Geoff Pennock on 0151 604 7289.



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# Surgery for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

## Information For Patients

### Fracture & Orthopaedic Clinic Arrowe Park Hospital

