

CARPAL TUNNEL RELEASE

St. Vincent's Factsheet



What is a Carpal Tunnel Release?

The carpal tunnel is a passageway between the bones of the wrist of your hand. The tendons and nerves from your hand that pass through this tunnel are responsible for the movement and sensation in your fingers, thumb and palm.

Although the exact cause of carpal tunnel syndrome is not clear, it may occur when the tendons become inflamed and place pressure on the nerves within the tunnel that causes a tingling and loss of normal feeling and aching in your hand.

A carpal tunnel release is an operation to the hand to release the pressure on the nerves (Carpel Tunnel Syndrome).

What happens before my operation?

Before surgery some patients attend a pre-admission clinic. At the clinic, the health care team will ask you about your health, medication and lifestyle. They may test your blood, take x-rays and an electrocardiogram (ECG).

Your doctor will talk to you about what medications to take before you come into hospital. It is important to tell your doctor if you are taking any blood thinning medications, such as aspirin or warfarin.

Please bring your medications into hospital with you.

The staff will let you know about what to bring to hospital, and when to stop eating and drinking before your surgery.

If you do not need to attend a clinic, we will telephone and tell you when you are scheduled for your operation and what to bring to hospital.

The night before your surgery, the hospital will call you to inform you of the time you need to stop eating and drinking before your surgery and what time to come into hospital.

What will happen on the day?

We ask that you shower before you come to hospital, and remove your jewellery, make up and nail polish. It is advised that you leave valuables such as jewellery and large sums of money at home to decrease the possibility of items being misplaced and theft.

On the day of your surgery, please make your way to the St. Vincent's Day of Surgery Admission Area, which is located on the first floor of the In-patient Services Building, Princes Street, Fitzroy.

When you arrive the nursing staff will check your pulse and blood pressure.

For your surgery you will need an anaesthetic. The anaesthetist (the doctor who will give you the anaesthetic) will meet with you before your surgery to talk to you about your health and the best anaesthetic for you. A general anaesthetic (anaesthetic that puts you to sleep) is normally used for this surgery.

St. Vincent's is a busy hospital so please be aware that you may need to wait up to three hours for your operation.

What happens during the surgery?

The surgeon makes a tiny cut, usually less than 6cm, in the palm of the affected hand and cuts the ligament, which is responsible for the compression of the nerve.

The surgeon may also remove any other soft tissue that is causing pressure on the nerve. This immediately relieves the pressure on the nerve by providing more space in the carpal tunnel. The skin is then stitched closed, and a firm bandage is applied.

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What happens after the operation?

You will wake up from the anaesthetic in the recovery room, and be transferred to the Day Surgery ward shortly afterwards. A nurse will monitor your blood pressure, pulse and temperature.

You may have an oxygen mask on to help you breathe and an intravenous drip (IV) in your arm giving you fluid. This will be removed once you are tolerating your food and drink.

You will also have a dressing over the operated hand. You will not be permitted to eat and drink until four hours after surgery. This is because you may feel sick, vomit or have pain after your surgery.

Your pain may be treated in a number of ways. This will be decided by you, your doctors and nurses depending on the type of pain you have. You may be given tablets or an injection to help you feel better.

When can I go home?

Most people stay in hospital only for the day of the operation. When you are fully recovered and had something to eat and drink, you will be allowed to go home. This is usually about 4 hours after the operation has finished.

Stitches and dressings are removed 10 to 14 days after surgery at your follow up appointment or by your GP.

Bruising of the hand and wrist is common, your hand may be placed in a sling to help reduce any swelling.

Before you leave the day ward someone will:

- Make a follow-up appointment at St. Vincent's Clinics for you.
- A letter will be electronically sent from the hospital to your local doctor (GP)
- Give you medication, if the doctor prescribes it.
- Give you a medical certificate if needed (you will need to ask).

Please remember to take all your belongings and x-rays home with you.

What should I do once I get home?

- Your doctor will recommend another 1 to 2 weeks off work depending on your job.
- Keep your hand dressing clean and dry.
- Resting your hand in an upright position may help to reduce any pain or swelling.
- You can immediately use your hand for light activities such as eating and dressing.
- Avoid doing any strenuous activity, especially lifting anything heavy on the affected hand (lift no more than 2-3kgs, like a bag of oranges) for 3 months.
- Avoid sport for 3 months.

If you experience any increased pain, swelling, or redness or any changes in the look of your hand go to your nearest emergency department or GP as soon as possible.

Contacts

Plastics Unit
St. Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
PO Box 2900
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
Telephone: 9288 2211
Liason Nurse: 9288 3884
Waiting List Officer: 9288 2271

This information is intended as a guideline only. If you have further questions or concerns, please ask your doctor.