

# Information for patients

## Carpal tunnel release

### 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 in 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 that tunnel. This causes tingling, a 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 (carpal tunnel syndrome).

### What happens before my surgery?

Before surgery, some patients attend a pre-admission clinic where the doctor will explain the surgery and you will sign a consent form.

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, Warfarin or clopidogrel (Plavix).

Please bring your medications into hospital with you.

If you use a dosette box or pill organiser to take your tablets, please ask your pharmacist to print out a list of your current medications so you can bring this to hospital.

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

### What will happen on the day of my surgery?

We ask that you shower before you come to hospital and remove jewellery, make up, nail polish and fake nails. 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 or stolen.

On the day of your surgery, please make your way to the St Vincent's Day of Surgery Admission (DOSA) 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.

You will need an anaesthetic for your surgery. 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.

## What happens after the surgery?

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

You will have a dressing on the operated hand.

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

You will not be permitted to eat and drink until four hours after surgery. This is because you may feel sick or vomit. Some pain is to be expected 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 have had something to eat and drink, you will be allowed to go home. This is usually about four 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 surgery ward someone will:

- make a follow-up appointment at St Vincent's Specialist Clinics for you
- send a letter 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 including x-rays home with you.

## What should I do once I get home?

Your doctor will recommend one to two weeks off work depending on your job.

Please 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 getting dressed.

Avoid doing any strenuous activity, especially lifting anything heavy on the affected hand (lift no more than 2-3kgs, roughly the weight of a bag of oranges) for three months. You should also avoid sport for three months.

If you experience 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

### Liaison Nurse

Tel: 9288 3883

### Waiting List Officer

Tel: 9288 2271

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