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Therapeutic Exercise Program for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome by OrthoInfo

To ensure that this exercise program is safe and effective for you, it should be performed under your doctor's supervision. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about which exercises will best help you meet your rehabilitation goals.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition that causes pain, numbness, and tingling in the hand and arm. The condition occurs when one of the major nerves to the hand — the median nerve — is squeezed or compressed as it travels through a narrow passageway in the wrist called the carpal tunnel.

Purpose of Program

A therapeutic exercise program is one treatment option your doctor may recommend. Exercises may help reduce the pressure on the median nerve at the wrist. They may be incorporated with bracing and/or splinting, medication, and activity changes to relieve symptoms.

Some patients may benefit from specific exercises that help the median nerve move more freely within the carpal tunnel. In addition, exercises to help tendons glide through the carpal tunnel can help improve joint range of motion and hand function.

Length of program: This exercise program for carpal tunnel syndrome should be continued for 3 to 4 weeks, unless otherwise specified by your doctor or physical therapist. After your recovery, these exercises can be continued as a maintenance program.

Do not ignore pain: You should not feel significant pain during an exercise. If numbness steadily worsens, if the exercises increase the pain, or if the pain does not improve after you have performed the exercises for 3 to 4 weeks, call your doctor or physical therapist.

Ask questions: If you are not sure how to do an exercise, or how often to do it, contact your doctor or physical therapist.

Additional Notes from Your Clinician

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Exercise Program for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

STRETCHING EXERCISES

1. Wrist Extension Stretch

Equipment needed: None

S

- reps,
4x a day

Days per week

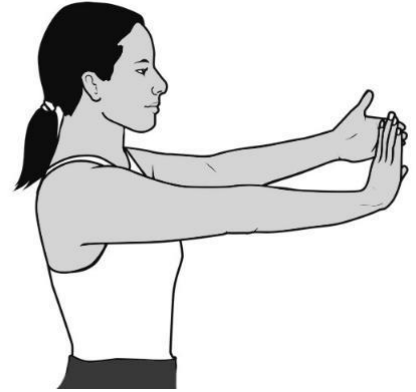
5 to 7

Additional instructions: This stretch should be done throughout the day, especially before activity. After recovery, this stretch should be included as part of a warm-up to activities that involve gripping.

Step-by-step directions

- Straighten your arm and bend your wrist back as if signaling someone to “stop.”
- Use your opposite hand to apply gentle pressure across the palm and pull it toward you until you feel a stretch on the inside of your forearm.
- Hold the stretch for 15 seconds.
- Repeat 5 times, then perform this stretch on the other arm.

Tip Do not lock your elbow.



2. Wrist Flexion Stretch

Equipment needed: None

S

- reps,
4x a day

Days per week

5 to 7

Additional instructions: This stretch should be done throughout the day, especially before activity. After recovery, this stretch should be included as part of a warm-up to activities that involve grip-ping.

Step-by-step directions

- Straighten your arm with your palm facing down and bend your wrist so that your fingers point down.
- Gently pull your hand toward your body until you feel a stretch on the outside of your forearm.
- Hold the stretch for 15 seconds.
- Repeat 5 times, then perform this stretch on the other arm.

Tip Do not lock your elbow.



Exercise Program for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

STRETCHING EXERCISES

3. Medial Nerve Glides

Equipment needed: None

S

10 to 15
reps
a day

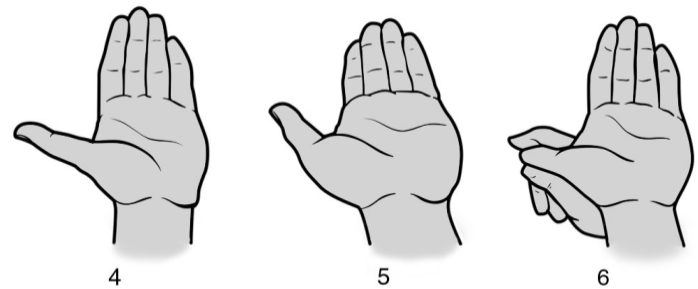
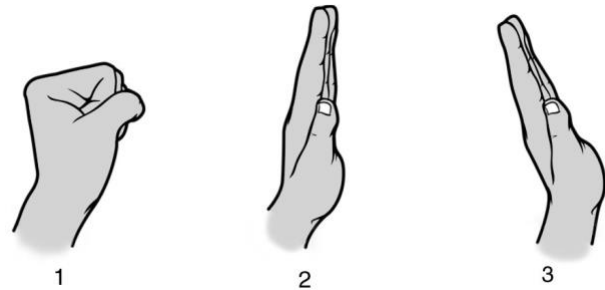
Days per week

6 to 7

Additional instructions: Apply heat to your hand for 15 minutes before performing these exercises. After completing the exercises, apply a bag of crushed ice or frozen peas to your hand for 20 minutes to prevent inflammation. Hold each position below for 3 to 7 seconds.

Step-by-step directions

- Make a fist with your thumb outside your fingers (1)
- Extend your fingers while keeping your thumb close to the side of your hand (2)
- Keep your fingers straight and extend your wrist (bend your hand backward toward your forearm) (3)
- Keep your fingers and wrist in position and extend your thumb (4)
- Keep your fingers, wrist, and thumb extended and turn your forearm palm up (5)
- Keep your fingers, wrist, and thumb extended and use your other hand to gently stretch the thumb (6)



Tip Do not put too much pressure on your thumb in position 6.

Exercise Program for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

STRETCHING EXERCISES

4. Tendon Glides

Equipment needed: None

S

5 - 10 reps,
2 to 3x a day

Days per week

Progress as
tolerated

Additional instructions: Apply heat to your hand for 15 minutes before performing these exercises. After completing the exercises, apply a bag of crushed ice or frozen peas to your hand for 20 minutes to prevent inflammation.

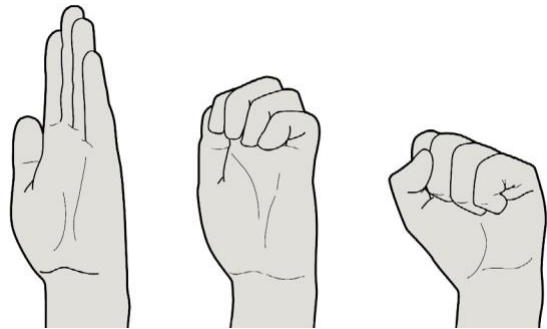
Two series of tendon gliding exercises are provided here. Follow these general instructions for both series:

- Proceed from position 1 through 3 in sequence
- Hold each position for 3 seconds
- As the exercises become easier to complete, increase the number of repetitions, or how many times per day you do them

Step-by-step directions for Series A

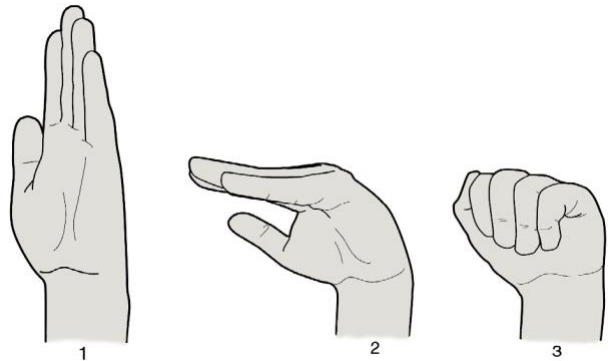
- With your hand in front of you and your wrist straight, fully straighten all of your fingers (1)
- Bend the tips of your fingers into the “hook” position with your knuckles pointing up (2)
- Make a tight fist with your thumb over your fingers (3)

Series A



Step-by-step directions for Series B

- With your hand in front of you and your wrist straight, fully straighten all of your fingers (1)
- Make a “tabletop” with your fingers by bending at your bottom knuckle and keeping the fingers straight (2)
- Bend your fingers at the middle joint, touching your fingers to your palm (3)



Notes