Diagnosis of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

by Ricker Polsdorfer, MD

En Español (Spanish Version)

The doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history, and examine your neck, arms, wrists, and hands. The physical exam will include tests of strength, sensation, and signs of nerve irritation or damage. The physical exam may include:

**Tinel's Sign** — The doctor will tap firmly on your wrist right over the carpal tunnel to see if it sends an electric shock feeling into your hand. You can actually do this test yourself, as well. Tap right over the creases on the inner side of your wrist between the two bones on either side of the base of your palm.

**Compression Test** — The doctor will bend your wrist down so that your thumb comes as close to your forearm as it will go, and then hold it there for a minute or two to see if it causes tingling and numbness in your hand.

Other tests may include:

**Nerve Conduction Study** — The speed at which your nerves carry signals can be determined by stimulating them with tiny electrodes attached to special machines. If conduction is slowed through the carpal tunnel, you probably have a problem in the carpal tunnel.

**Electromyogram (EMG)** — In a similar fashion, tiny currents can be used to stimulate muscles. The muscles respond with electrical activity that can be measured. When the nerves connecting to muscles are damaged, the muscles give off abnormal signals.

**X-rays, CT Scan, and MRI Scan** — These imaging tests may identify other causes of carpal tunnel syndrome or give more extensive information as to your particular problem.

**Arthroscopy** — This procedure is useful in both diagnosing and treating carpal tunnel syndrome. This is a minor surgical procedure during which a thin, lighted tube (arthroscope) is inserted into your wrist. The surgeon can then look through the tube to see exactly what is wrong. The same tube can be used to repair the problem, using tiny tools inserted through the arthroscope into the wrist.

REFERENCES:


Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research website. Available at: http://www.mayo.edu/.

Previous | Next