

## **Frequently Asked Post-Op Questions for Carpal Tunnel Release:**

### **My surgery is done, now what do I need to do?**

For 10-14 days after surgery, you will wear a bulky dressing that will stay on until your first post-op appointment. Your fingers and elbow are free to move. Showering with a bag taped at the forearm over the bandages will keep everything dry and clean. At your first post-op appointment, your sutures will be removed by nursing staff or physician assistant. At this point in time you can shower and perform range of motion exercises and activities as tolerated. At 5-6 weeks after the surgery, you will see your surgeon for a final checkup on recovery.

### **How soon will I see relief of my symptoms?**

Most patients get relief of nighttime waking/symptoms, burning, and tingling in the first few days after surgery. Dullness to the affected fingers may take many months to recover and, in some severe cases, this may never fully recover. Underlying problems with neuropathy (nerve damage), diabetes, thyroid disease, or cervical radiculopathy (pinched nerve in the neck or arthritis) may make recovery lengthier or less than complete.

### **When can I go back to work?**

You can return to work the day after surgery if your work demands are low. But usually taking 3-5 days off before returning to work is most ideal if the job does not require too much manual labor or lifting greater than 1-2 pounds. If the job requires a lot of manual labor, heavy use of the surgical hand in the first 2 weeks will be difficult and may lead to wound breakdown. In this case it is recommended to either take time off or return to light duty for 2 weeks and then gradually ease your way into heavier activities.

### **What can I do for my pain?**

You will have a pain medication prescribed to you to take, if needed. Also limiting activities, elevating, and applying some ice can help manage post-op pain. You are allowed to use any over the counter medication of choice if you wish to avoid the prescribed narcotic. You should not drink alcohol, drive or operate heavy dangerous machinery while on the narcotic.

### **Why does my palm ache and what can I do for this?**

This is called "pillar" pain and it is a normal symptom after carpal tunnel surgery. How long it lasts varies from person to person but it will resolve. If it's a major interference with daily activities, wearing a brace with a silicon padding and avoidance of pushing with the palm can help.

### **Will the surgical scar and redness improve?**

Yes. This may take weeks to months but it does improve. Once the incision has fully healed you can massage the scar with some over the counter cream (any moisturizing cream or Vitamin E based cream) to help. And when outdoors, applying sunblock to the scar will help it from becoming too visible. The scar will eventually become invisible after around a year.

### **What if I don't get full relief after carpal tunnel release surgery and what does that mean?**

If you don't get full relief from surgery this could mean many things including incomplete release of the carpal tunnel during surgery or underlying issues with neuropathy (nerve damage at baseline), advanced

diabetes, thyroid disease, or cervical radiculopathy (pinched nerve in the neck) that is preventing full relief.

**What is the success rate of carpal tunnel release surgery? What is the recurrence rate?**

The success rate of surgery in providing relief of symptoms is extremely high. This is the most commonly performed procedure in hand surgery and is one of the most successful, so it is extremely rewarding for patients and providers. Recurrence is rare and may occur in less than 2% of patients at 10 years.

**What are the risks during, and after carpal tunnel release surgery?**

As with any surgery, there is a small degree of risk. Some risks include incomplete release of the carpal tunnel with persistent symptoms, bleeding, bruising, infection, injury to the nerve or its branches, injuries to blood vessels, decrease in thumb grip strength, and scar tenderness and sensitivity. The complication rates above are extremely rare other than some minor reversible side effects such as scar tenderness which resolves over weeks or months.

**Thank you for allowing us to be your orthopedic and hand surgery office and providers of choice.**

Sincerely,

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**Electronic link and downloadable version of this educational material is also available online at**

**[TarekSibaiMD.com](http://TarekSibaiMD.com)**