

## **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**

### **Prevention:**

Diet:

Decrease the amount of salt in the diet by not adding additional salt to food and avoiding foods known to be high in salt such as junk food, microwave food, etc. Learn to read the food labels for food content.

Avoid white sugar, caffeine, processed grains and corn. These food items deplete the body of vitamin B6.

Eliminate red meat. Red meat produces arachidonic acid which leads to increased inflammation by the production of inflammatory prostaglandins and leukotrienes.

Decrease the consumption of foods that lead to production of oxalic acid. These foods include beets, spinach, vegetables of the cabbage family, eggs and asparagus. Excess amounts of oxalic acid can promote joint inflammation

Exercises and body mechanics:

The following table is taken from the book Prescription for Nutritional Healing, second edition, by James F. Balch and Phyllis A. Balch, Avery Publishing Group,

### **Treatment:**

Take the following vitamins, herbs and nutrients:

### **Herbal Remedies for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**

Millions of dollars are spent annually by American businesses on worker disability claims and medical costs resulting from carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), a common work-related injury. CTS is usually associated with repetitive wrist motion injury resulting from continuous rapid use of the fingers. In addition, CTS can develop secondary to fluid retention due to pregnancy, pressure from bone spurs, inflammatory arthritis, menopause, Raynaud's disease, hypothyroidism and diabetes mellitus. Swelling and inflammation, conditions common to all these causes of CTS, cause compression of the median nerve within the carpal tunnel- a small opening about one-quarter inch below the surface of the wrist. Conventional medical options used to treat CTS include physical therapy, wrist splints, anti-inflammatory medication and surgery. Although less well known, CTS can also be treated naturally using herbal remedies which are less invasive, less expensive and less likely to cause side effects than are conventional treatments.

Before listing which herbs are best to treat CTS, though, it will be helpful to understand certain basic information about herbs. To begin with, the term herb, according to Michael Murray, N.D., author of the book *The Healing Power of Herbs*, refers to a plant used for medicinal purposes. Commercial herbal preparations are available in different forms: bulk herbs, teas, tinctures, fluid extracts, tablets and capsules. Tinctures, Murray explains, are made by soaking an herb in a water and alcohol solvent for a specified amount of time (depending on the herb). The solution is then pressed out yielding the tincture. A liquid herbal extract is more concentrated than a tincture; still further concentration results in a solid herbal extract. Finally, a solid extract can be dried, ground into a powder, and formulated to make herbal capsules and tablets.

Next, when shopping for herbs, it is best to select an herbal extract

which is *standardized* or guaranteed to contain a guaranteed amount of active component. Natural herbal products contain other constituents of the plant. Herbalists maintain that these additional plant ingredients balance the more powerful ingredients. Synthetic prescription drugs, on the other hand, are formulated to contain a single active ingredient. This difference in potency and composition explains some of the difference effects seen between the two preparations- herbal products on the one hand are less potent, take longer to achieve the desired result and are generally safer while prescription drugs are more potent, work faster and are more likely to be associated with side effects. In fact, according to the book *The People's Pharmacy*, every year in the U.S., drug reactions due to prescription drugs account for 73,000 deaths and up to 11% of all hospital admissions. In contrast, according to a 1992 report in the *Food and Law Journal*, herbs are much safer and rarely account for serious side effects. This article was based on an extensive review of reports from the American Association of Poison Control Centers and the Centers for Disease Control (Atlanta, GA).

It is also important to point out that, contrary to popular belief, there is a sound scientific basis for using herbal therapies. Scientific studies demonstrating the safety and efficacy of herbal products are routinely reported in peer reviewed journals (mostly European). Publications which survey the world literature of alternative medicine are readily available. In fact, over 90,000 citations (many on herbal medicine) are available through the NIH Office of Alternative Medicine (<http://altmed.od.nih.gov>).

When selecting herb therapies to treat CTS, herbs which will decrease tissue swelling and inflammation are recommended, including the following:

ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), an herb which has been used for medicinal uses for thousands of years, decreases inflammation by inhibiting prostaglandin and leukotriene formation. Daily consumption of capsules containing a total 2 to 4 grams of powdered ginger (taken between meals) is recommended. Doses larger than this amount can cause stomach upset.

capsaicin, the active component of cayenne pepper (*Capsicum annuum*), when applied topically to the skin, stimulates then blocks small-diameter pain fibers by depleting a neurotransmitter called substance P. Substance P has been shown to activate inflammation in joint tissues. Creams containing 0.025 or 0.075 percent capsaicin may be applied up to four times daily to the skin overlying wrists affected by CTS. Capsaicin containing cremes often cause a mild local burning sensation for the first day or two; the effect fades away thereafter.

curcumin, a derivative of the herb tumeric (*Curcuma longa*), the major ingredient of curry powder, is another herb with potent anti-inflammatory properties. In fact, studies have shown that curcumin is as effective as cortisone and phenylbutazone without the significant side effects of these two medications. The recommended dose of curcumin is 400 to 600mg. three times a day. Curcumin is better absorbed when combined with an equal amount of bromelain, a protein digestive enzyme obtained from the pineapple plant (*Ananas comusus*). Bromelain possesses anti-inflammatory properties as well. Both herbs should be taken on an empty stomach.

St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is useful for more than just treating depression. St. John's Wort (available either as an extract, pill or tablet for oral consumption or as a cream for topical application) possesses anti-inflammatory properties and acts as a restorative tonic for the nervous system. Follow directions on the package.

cornsilk (*Zea mays*), parsley (*Aphanes arvensis*) and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) are natural diuretics. These herbs are available as liquid extracts, teas, or capsules. Follow directions on the package.

Herbs are also relatively inexpensive when compared to prescription drugs - a month's supply of herbs usually costs less than 20 dollars. Prescription drugs, on the other hand, frequently cost many times this amount.

Before taking herbs to treat CTS, though, certain precautions should be observed. First, current medications or therapies used to treat CTS should not be discontinued without first checking with your physician. Second, although herbs are generally considered safe, they can interact with certain prescription medication. So if you are currently taking prescription medication, it is advisable to first check with your physician or pharmacist before taking an herbal product. Finally, if CTS fails to improve or gets worse (particularly if weakness starts to develop in the affected thumb) you should seek appropriate medical advise.

For all of the reasons listed above including the high potential for benefit, the low risks and the low cost, it makes good sense to use natural herbal remedies in addition to conventional approaches to treat CTS.

#### Vitamins

vitamin B complex 50 mg daily

a multivitamin high in antioxidants, minerals and trace elements

### **Homeopathic medication:**

Apply arnica gel to the affected wrist four times a day to reduce inflammation.

Take *Rhus toxicodendron* as directed on the bottle to relieve acute inflammation.

Hydrotherapy:

Apply to the affected wrist a washcloth soaked in hot water for three minutes alternating with a washcloth soaked in ice water for 30-60 seconds. This technique can also be performed by soaking the wrist in hot and cold water. Repeat this process 3 to 5 times per session up to three times daily.

Neural therapy:

An injection of local anesthetic is injected to remove short circuits in the body's electrical network. It is theorized that the injection frees up the body's flow of energy and normalizes cellular function.

Massage the affected wrist with 5 - 10 drops of essential oil of clove, cinnamon or thyme dissolved in 20 cc of sesame or almond oil. Discontinue if a rash develops (5% of the population develops a rash from clove and cinnamon ).

Use a cotton ball to apply 70%DMSO(only available by a doctor's prescription) to the affected wrist 3 times daily for three days. If

improvement is noted, continue the same routine for three more days and then switch to once a day application of DMSO for an additional three days. Make sure the skin is clean before applying the DMSO.

*There will be a garlic smell which will come out in the sweat pores and in the breath for as long as DMSO is being given. This will disappear within 24 hours of stopping the medication.*

Manual lymphatic drainage massage can be helpful for alleviating the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Magnetic therapy:

Specially designed magnets and wrist bands worn on the affected wrist decrease inflammation and increase blood flow.

Chiropractic:

A variety of methods are available to treat carpal tunnel syndrome.

### **Reiki:**

Reiki is a form of healing energy which can be used to help balance energy in the body thereby decreasing inflammation and pain.

Traditional Chinese Medicine:

Chinese herbs, acupuncture and acupressure are useful methods for treating the pain and inflammation associated with carpal tunnel syndrome. According to information presented in the book, *Alternative Medicine*, carpal tunnel pain can be relieved by firmly pressing acupressure points P6 and TW5 (see illustrations below) on the

affected hand for two minutes. The fingertips should be positioned between the bones of the forearm two finger widths below the wrist crease. This exercise should be repeated three times daily for a month

**Massage:**

Garden City Park, NY, 1997, p.193.