Avoid Repetitive Strain Injuries



WHAT'S AT STAKE

If your job involves repeated motion or vibration to the hands, carpal tunnel syndrome could creep up on you. It tends to occur in carpentry, cashiering and assembly line work, but it can also occur in many other kinds of work.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Carpal tunnel syndrome affects the hands and wrists, and can result in permanent disability. It is one of the most common of the on-the-job injuries that build up gradually over a period of time. The carpal tunnel is the name of a little channel running through the middle of the wrist, carrying tendons and a major nerve. When the hand or wrist is subjected to repetitive work, impact or vibration, tissues swell. This squeezes the nerve and tendons and causes problems with the hands and fingers.

EXAMPLE
An electronics assembly worker began to notice a tingling feeling, numbness and clumsiness in his hands. After awhile, the tingling became a continual burning pain. Eventually, the pain became so bad and the hand so weak that it couldn't grasp objects.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Carpal tunnel syndrome is much easier to prevent than cure. Here are tips:

Find comfortable positions
Work with your wrist straight, not turned at an angle. Adjust your workstation and tools so you can work with your wrists and hands in a comfortable and neutral position. Grip tools and materials with your whole hand where possible. Tools which extend only part of the way across the palm can contribute to carpal tunnel syndrome.

Use the right tools
Take advantage of tools designed to allow you to keep your wrists in the correct position. Use other devices which help keep wrists in the correct position, such as wrist rests (for keyboards) and wrist braces.

Reduce impacts
Remember never to pound with your hands. Also try to avoid continuous vibration to your hands. Special padding on tools and equipment helps reduce vibration.

Think ahead
Switch tasks to give your hands a break. Don’t repeat the same motion hour after hour. Do flexibility and strength exercises for your hands, wrists and arms.

Seek help if needed
Seek medical help if you think you might be developing carpal tunnel syndrome. Treatment can include rest, therapy, splints, medicine and surgery.

FINAL WORD

Don’t wait for this problem to go away on its own. If it becomes worse, it will be more difficult to treat.