Avoiding Carpal Tunnel Syndrome



What's at Stake?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, or CTS, is nerve damage in your hand that's caused by repetitive motions, such as using tools or a computer keyboard.

It usually starts with numbness or a 'pins and needles' feeling, and you gradually lose your ability to grasp objects. As it gets worse, you experience steady burning pain and it becomes hard to do simple things like picking something up or buttoning a shirt.

What's the Danger?

CTS occurs when the median nerve (a main nerve in your hand) is squeezed or compressed as it travels through the carpal tunnel of the wrist.

And while it can develop slowly, if you don't fix it, the nerve damage could become permanent.

How to Protect Yourself

1. Stretch and warm-up before you start your task. Be sure to take frequent, short exercise breaks during the day. You need to be careful that you don't injure yourself while doing these stretches so get guidance from your safety manager, supervisor, or employee health contact.
2. Try to arrange your tasks so that you can vary your hand and finger motions frequently.
3. Keep your hands and arms warm when you work. Sometimes just wearing a long-sleeved shirt is all that's needed.
4. Keep yourself physically fit. CTS can be brought on by a lack of muscle tone in your shoulders, hands and arms combined with a job which requires repetitive motions.
5. Adjust your workstation so that your arms and hands remain level with the floor or in a "neutral" position. Keep your wrists straight, not bent at an angle.
6. At a computer, use specially designed rests which help your wrists stay in the neutral position and the rests also provide a cushion which pads your wrists.

If you suspect you may have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, see your doctor immediately. Treatment may include rest, change of tasks, medication, and braces worn during work or at night. As a last resort surgery may be performed to loosen the ligament band.

Final Word

Finally, if you suspect you have carpal tunnel syndrome, see your doctor immediately. Treatment may include rest, job rotation (or change of task), anti-inflammatory medication, and braces worn during work or at night. As a last resort surgery may be performed to loosen the ligament band.