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Health & Safety

CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night with a burning or painful tingling sensation in your hand? Do you ever get shooting pains up your arm when you type? If so, you may be experiencing the first signs of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) – one of the most serious repetitive motion injuries. Some experts say that carpal tunnel syndrome is the workplace disease of the decade.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by fast, repetitive motions that strain the tendons of the wrist and arm. This can then cause the tendons to swell. The swelling of the tendons crimps the median nerve in the carpal tunnel, where it and the nerve provides feeling to the hand. Pain from the compressed nerve can travel to the shoulders, neck and upper back.

Who is at risk?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is most likely to develop among secretaries, typists, telephone operators, cashiers, computer operators, and data entry clerks. More than 70 percent of all carpal tunnel syndrome injuries involve women.

Is CTS dangerous?

If diagnosed early CTS is highly treatable. However, if ignored or untreated the condition will most likely worsen. The pain can become unbearable, extending the full length of the arm, and permanent nerve damage may occur. Certain repetitive hand motions, such as typing on a computer keyboard, can aggravate the condition and cause permanent injury. Therefore, employees should learn how to modify the way they use their hands to help reduce the risk of developing CTS.

How to prevent CTS

Hand positioning – Try to maintain a straight or neutral wrist position. When you keep your wrist and elbows straight, you place less pressure on the tendons and nerves in your hands. **DO NOT BEND YOUR WRISTS WHEN YOU WORK AT COMPUTER KEYBOARDS!** Also, use a gentle pushdown motion when moving the keys.

Hand exercises – Do a variety of hand conditioning exercises. Strengthening hand and arm muscles can help reduce the need to compensate for weak muscles with a poor wrist position.

Adjustable equipment – Adjust the height of your chair and keyboard so your elbows are bent at roughly a 90 degree angle. Tilt keyboard slightly so it doesn't lie flat in front of you.

Breaks – Get up frequently. Give the hands a break periodically by letting them rest. Take a break every hour or so and stretch your back, neck, arms, hands, and wrists. Alternating easy and difficult tasks, switching hands, or rotating work activities also can be helpful.

Accessories – To keep your hands in the right position, you might use a wrist pad – a thick vinyl roll that costs about \$30.00 and runs along the lower edge of the keyboard.

If you think your rights have been violated, contact your local CSUEU steward
