

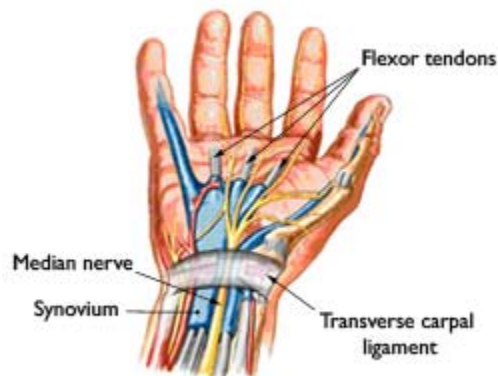
# Endoscopic Carpal Tunnel Release: A New Solution for an Old Problem

*Jeffrey K. Moore, M.D.*

*Moore Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, PA.*

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a condition caused by excessive pressure on the Median Nerve as it travels through the wrist. Symptoms include numbness in the hand and fingers and sometimes pain.

If diagnosed and treated early, carpal tunnel syndrome can often be managed without surgery. In cases where the diagnosis is uncertain or the condition is mild to moderate, your doctor will always try simple treatment measures first. If significant symptoms persist or if nerve tests show nerve damage, the best treatment is often surgical release.

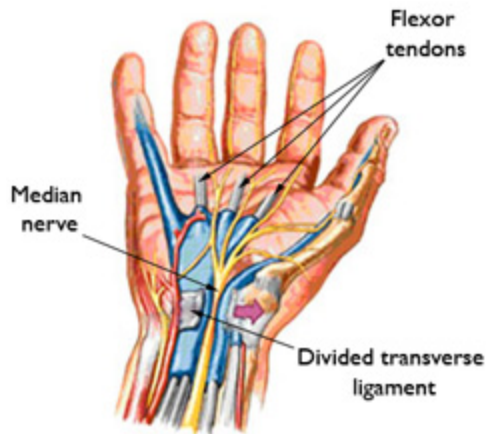


Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by pressure on the median nerve traveling through the carpal tunnel.

There are two types of Carpal Tunnel surgery: open surgery and endoscopic release.

Endoscopic Carpal Tunnel Release (ECTR) is a relatively new procedure utilized more frequently over the last 2-3 years. It is not known what percentage of surgeons are actually using this procedure, but it is becoming more available as more surgeons learn how to use this technique. About 80% of carpal tunnel surgery is still being done as an "open" procedure.

ECTR is an operation where a small incision is made in the wrist and a thin fiberoptic tube with a camera attached (endoscope) is used to visualize the transverse carpal ligament. The ligament is released with a tiny knife inserted through the incision in the wrist while it is visualized on the video screen. This releases pressure on the nerve and allows it to heal.



The ligament is cut during surgery. When it heals, there is more room for the nerve and tendons.

The difference between ECTR and open carpal tunnel release is that with ECTR there is only one small incision required, and it is not in the palm. However, with open carpal tunnel procedures, a longer incision is necessary and it is in the palm. By using an endoscopic technique for surgery it is believed that the skin and soft tissue of the palm can be preserved and therefore less post operative pain and more rapid recovery may be possible.

Both types of surgery are done as an outpatient under local anesthesia in an operating room. It takes about 30 minutes. The success rate is very high and the complication rate very low. The hand can be used for light activities the following day, and sutures are removed at about one week. A few people need physical therapy to maximize recovery.

The primary benefits of the endoscopic technique over the open operation are less pain and more rapid recovery. Perhaps the most impressive part about endoscopic carpal tunnel release is how quickly patients can get back to their normal activities. Although many patients do have some pain in the palm and discomfort with the fingers after surgery, most appear to be able to resume most of their day to day activities within a few days after surgery and often return to work 1-2 weeks after surgery. Open surgery with the traditional approach takes a substantially longer time for recovery. Even with ECTR, many patients are encouraged to avoid heavy lifting and repetitive motion for 6-8 weeks after surgery. The need for therapy is lower due to less swelling and easier use of the hand following surgery.

If you are interested in having an endoscopic carpal tunnel release, look for a surgeon who has experience doing this specific endoscopic surgery. Ask how successful he or she has been with people who had conditions similar to yours. The end results of traditional and endoscopic procedures are the same. Your doctor will discuss the surgical procedure that best meets your needs.