

Fall 2006

LivingWELL

Northern Nevada
MEDICAL CENTER
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FOR HEALTH AND
WELLNESS

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How can I tell if it's carpal tunnel syndrome?

B. Forrest Burke, MD

Numb hands: The first symptom

"I was telling a friend about my hands going to sleep at night. She said I may have carpal tunnel syndrome and that I should see you."

My patient was a 50-year-old woman who was planning for her daughter's wedding. She was preparing the table centerpieces along with the flowers.

Early detection: Key to recovery without surgery

Early detection of carpal tunnel syndrome is the key to resolving symptoms without surgery. Numbness in the first three fingers is usually the first symptom. Since significant pain generally occurs later, many patients wait longer than they should before they are evaluated. The longer patients wait, the more likely they will need surgery to resolve the condition. In severe cases, even surgery may not result in a complete recovery.

EMG: Key to detection

Electromyogram (EMG) nerve testing is the test of choice for detection. EMG nerve testing not only can determine if the patient has carpal tunnel syndrome, it also can determine the severity of the condition.

EMG grading of carpal tunnel syndrome: Key to treatment

If the condition is rated as mild by EMG, nonoperative treatments usually succeed in resolving the symptoms. If the condition is severe, surgical decompression usually is required to resolve the symptoms. If the condition is moderate, the outcome primarily depends on how long the symptoms have been present.

Back to the mother of the bride

EMG nerve testing confirmed that this patient had mild carpal tunnel syndrome. The sensory part of the median nerve showed slowing, but the motor part and muscles were normal. I prescribed a wrist brace for her, and she went for therapy. She had a complete recovery. In her case, the repetitive gripping and grasping with her hands in preparing for her daughter's wedding was the cause.

Key features of carpal tunnel syndrome

- Affects the first three fingers: thumb, index and middle
- Symptoms worsen at night because of nerve cooling and hand positioning
- More common in women than men, and with increasing age
- Associated with diabetes, hypothyroidism, rheumatoid arthritis, pregnancy and menopause
- Associated with repetitive gripping, grasping and vibration
- Wrist braces and therapy can help
- Electromyogram (EMG) nerve testing can diagnose carpal tunnel syndrome

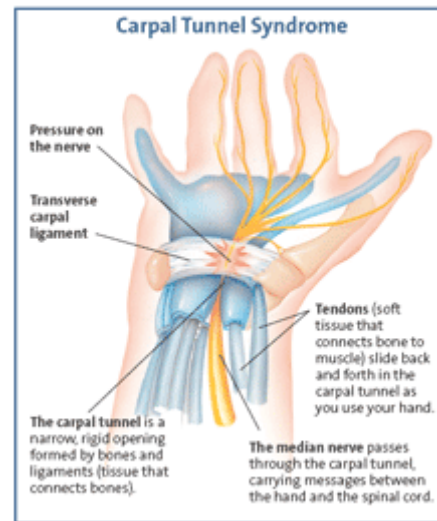


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B. Forrest Burke, MD, offers EMG nerve testing in his Silver State Spinecare office at 1055 Roberta Lane at Pyramid Way, Suite 103, Sparks. Call **331-2600** or visit www.SilverStateSpine.com for more information.



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