

TRUCK TALK

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Carpal Tunnel

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – it's NOT just for office and factory workers any more!

You're kidding, right???? Big 'ole burley (OK, some of us are!) truck drivers coming down with Carpal Tunnel??? Most folks believe that this condition is exclusive to office workers and their keyboards and factory workers who endure repetitive motion type of jobs – but that certainly couldn't be farther from the truth!

First off, exactly WHAT is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome? According to WordNet it is a painful disorder caused by compression of a nerve in the passageway in the wrist through which nerves and the flexor muscles of the hands pass; characterized by discomfort and weakness in the hands and fingers and by sensations of tingling, burning or numbness. So, when you think about it – this compression can be caused by a number of different working situations OTHER than repetitive motion.

More recently, occupational therapists have expanded their criteria covering work related carpal tunnel syndrome exposures to include 'repeated, prolonged gripping of anything – whether it's a steering wheel or a tool – can contribute to carpal tunnel syndrome's pain and inflammation. There are also a number of different procedures which can be employed to treat and alleviate the pain and frequent numbness which accompanies carpal tunnel syndrome. The first, most common and most desirable is the use of anti-inflammatory drugs such as Advil or Motrin used per the manufacturer's instructions. In more severe cases, frequently an injection or series of injections of cortisone can relieve the pain through 'lubrication' of the tunnel. Certainly surgery is an option but should only be considered after the above methods have failed.

But, as many of our mothers advised us, an ounce of prevention is frequently worth a pound of cure and that is probably the best advice that any of us have ever received. In the case of carpal tunnel among truckers, it's a good idea for the drivers to place their wrists at the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions on the steering wheel with the wrists as straight as possible. If we didn't have enough reason NOT to talk on the cell phone while driving without a hands free device – here's one more. The 'bent wrist' manner in which many people employ to hold their cell phones can contribute to escalated symptoms! ANOTHER good reason (besides the many which we have given you over the years) to HANG UP AND DRIVE!

A preventative measure that can be employed by drivers would be using a wrist splint (available over the counter at most drug stores and pharmacies) which can help to keep the wrist straight and avoid aggravation (if not the occurrence) of carpal tunnel.

