

# Computer Operators Risk Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

When computers and word processors first came on the office scene who thought they might be detrimental to the operator's health? Yet we know today that operating such equipment—an absolute necessity in most offices—has created a dramatic escalation in the number of carpal tunnel syndrome cases, a repetitive-motion-type injury we'll call CTS for short.

This wrist and hand malady results from performing the same motions day after day for hours at a time, as when a person types at a word processor constantly.

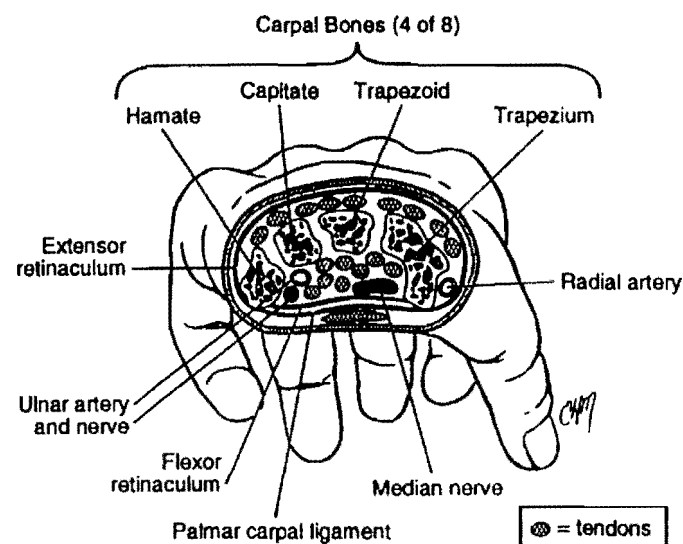
## SOFT TISSUES AGGRAVATED

CTS gets its name from a narrow tunnel in the wrist which allows flexor tendons and the median nerve to pass through. In computer operators, trouble begins when wrist, hand, and finger motions involved in making thousands upon thousands of keystrokes day after day aggravate and break down soft tissues in the carpal tunnel faster than nature can make repairs. Such daily infinitesimal damage accumulates and eventually expresses itself in the wrists, hands, and fingers through swelling, pain, numbness, weakness, tingling, burning, and difficulty in opening and closing the hands. If the condition is not treated properly early on, permanent injury including loss of the use of the hand is possible.

## CUMULATIVE TRAUMA DISORDERS

Actually, any bodily part is fair game for what is called "cumulative trauma disorder," a generic term doctors apply to injury caused by repetitive motion, usually in an occupation or trade. Assembly line workers are especially susceptible to such injuries because of their repetitive work motions, but any ongoing, repetitive irritation, stress, strain, sprain, physical tension, prolonged tautness, or pressure can produce, anywhere in the body, a cumulative trauma disorder such as carpal tunnel syndrome in the wrists and hands.

## INSIDE THE WRIST



**Thousands upon thousands of keystrokes aggravate and break down soft tissues.**

## COMPUTER OPERATOR'S PREVENTION CHECKLIST

Need we mention that prevention is highly desirable? Here are some steps computer operators can take to avoid carpal tunnel syndrome:

- ✓When typing, do not flex your wrists. Keep them straight. Use only finger movements with minimum pressure when striking keys.
- ✓Keep your keyboard dust free and generally clean for minimum keystroke pressure.
- ✓Rather than reach for a distant key, move your entire hand in that direction.
- ✓Give your fingers, hands, and wrists a break by frequently integrating other office tasks into your typing routine.
- ✓Your typing table should be slightly higher than your elbows when your arms are relaxed at your sides.
- ✓If possible, sit in a chair with arm rests and consciously let your shoulders relax. Keep them level.

Just as in other structural problems, once CTS begins to develop, early intervention is a must for avoiding permanent injury. See your chiropractic doctor at the first hint of carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms.