



### Tai-Nan Wang L.Ac., O.M.D.

4295 Gesner Street, Suite 1A  
San Diego, CA 92117  
619-684-1848

## Get Relief from Repetitive Stress Injuries with Acupuncture

Repetitive stress injuries (RSI) are the most common job-related injuries and are responsible for the highest number of days lost among all work related injuries. One of the most well-known types of repetitive stress injury, carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) accounts for over two million visits to physicians' offices and approximately 465,000 carpal tunnel release operations each year, making it the most frequent surgery of the hand and wrist.

Symptoms of repetitive stress injuries include tightness, stiffness, pain, tingling, numbness, coldness and loss of strength in the arm. Carpal tunnel syndrome is a repetitive stress injury that refers specifically to the inflammation of a specific ligament that puts pressure on the median nerve.



Acupuncture is extremely effective for treating repetitive stress injuries including carpal tunnel syndrome; eliminating the need for surgery or the use of anti-inflammatory drugs or corticosteroids. In fact, one of the most common reasons that people get acupuncture is for repetitive stress injuries. Recent studies even suggest that acupuncture may be more effective than corticosteroids when it comes to treating CTS.

### What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway in the wrist made up of ligaments and bones. The median nerve and the tendons that connect the fingers to the muscles of the forearm pass through this tightly spaced tunnel.

Carpal tunnel syndrome, also known as median nerve entrapment, occurs when swelling or irritation of the tendons in the carpal tunnel results in pressure on the median nerve causing pain in the palm side of the wrist and pain and tingling in the fingers. The median nerve controls sensations to the palm side of the thumb and fingers, as well as impulses to some small muscles in the hand that allow the fingers and thumb to move.

Symptoms usually start gradually, with frequent burning, tingling, or numbness in the palm of the hand and the fingers, especially the index, middle and ring fingers. Pain can sometimes travel up the arm and affect the shoulder. The symptoms often first appear during the night. As symptoms worsen, people might feel pain, weakness, or numbness in the hand and wrist, radiating up the arm during the day. Decreased grip strength may make it difficult to form a fist, grasp small objects, or perform other manual tasks. If not properly treated, CTS can cause irreversible nerve damage and permanent deterioration of muscle tissue.

### Diagnosis and Treatment of Repetitive Stress Injuries with Acupuncture

From an Oriental medicine perspective, a repetitive stress injury is seen as a disruption of the flow of Qi and Blood (Xue) within the area and associated with cold, dampness or wind penetrating the muscles and sinews. Acupuncture points, stretching exercises, herbal remedies and nutritional supplements are chosen to treat accordingly.

In addition to reducing the swelling, inflammation and pain, acupuncture addresses any headaches, neck pain, shoulder stiffness and sleeping problems that often accompany this condition. Your treatment may also take into account any underlying conditions that contribute to the development of RSI including posture, obesity, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid problems, diabetes, and hormonal changes of pregnancy and menopause.

**If you or someone you know suffers from a repetitive stress injury, please call to find out more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you.**

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## Acupuncture Effective in Treating Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

According to a randomized, controlled study published in the May 2009 issue of the Clinical Journal of Pain, acupuncture is as effective as the corticosteroid, prednisone, for the treatment of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).

The study investigated the efficacy of acupuncture compared with steroid treatment in patients with mild-to-moderate carpal tunnel syndrome as measured by both nerve conduction studies and symptom assessment surveys. One group received eight acupuncture treatments over four weeks, and the other group received daily oral doses of prednisone for four weeks.

Results showed that acupuncture was just as effective as the corticosteroid for pain, numbness, tingling and weakness. For the symptoms of night time awakening and motor function, the acupuncture group had better results.

Researchers concluded that acupuncture is a safe and effective treatment option for CTS for those who experience side effects to oral steroids or for those who do not wish to undergo surgery.

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## Reduce Your Repetitive Stress Injury Risk

Managing repetitive stress injuries often requires some lifestyle changes, and it can take time to work out a strategy that works best for you.

Here are a few minor changes you can implement to minimize stress on your hands and wrists:

**Alternate Tasks** - Avoid doing the same task for more than a couple of hours at a time and alternate between tasks that use different muscle groups where possible.

Fatigue is a sign that you need to take a break. Take small breaks to gently stretch and bend your hands and wrists and readjust your position.

**Reduce Pressure** - Many people use more force than needed to perform tasks involving their hands, which can increase pressure and cause irritation. Be mindful of the speed and amount of pressure used to perform tasks. Ease up, slow down, and grip using your palm or whole hand to distribute the load. If using tools such as riveters or jackhammers for extended periods, take frequent breaks or operate the tool at a speed that causes the least amount of vibration.

**Cultivate Good Posture** - Incorrect posture can cause your shoulders to roll forward, shortening neck and shoulder muscles and compressing nerves in your neck, which can affect your wrists, hands, and fingers.

Shoulders and neck should be relaxed to open the chest and allow your head to float upwards without strain. When using a keyboard, wrists should be in a relaxed middle position and in a straight line with your forearms at elbow height or slightly lower.

