

Carpal tunnel syndrome is often misdiagnosed

Question: I get wrist pain and numbness in my fingers and have a history of neck pain. I am not sure what causes the problem but have been told I have carpal-tunnel syndrome and require surgery. Do I have other choices?

Answer: Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is a disorder whereby the median nerve that runs through the center of the wrist is irritated by the surrounding tendons, ligaments, and bones. This nerve travels to the fingers and when it is pinched can cause a characteristic numbness, tingling, burning and pain in the hand and wrist.

There are many causes of these same symptoms you experience and CTS is misdiagnosed very often. The origin of the median nerve is in the neck, passes through the shoulder, elbow, and wrist and finally through a multitude of muscles used during the course of a day. New long-term studies coming out each year are revealing that impingement of the median nerve actually tends to occur more often in the neck and shoulder regions than in the wrist.

Just because your pain is experienced in the wrist it does not necessarily mean it is originating there. A proper examination for CTS would include the entire shoulder, arm, and neck in order to trace the full length of the nerve. Since the neck is the most common site for impingement to occur, a consultation with a spine specialist (chiropractor) would be in your best interests.

Additional diagnostic testing of an EMG (electromyograph), which determines interruptions in nerve flow to muscles, combined with the results of

an X-ray, or MRI (magnetic-resonance imaging), and general exam may assist in a more accurate diagnosis also.