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PATIENT GUIDE

# Carpal Tunnel Release

## Surgical Guide



A clear, simple guide to help you prepare for carpal tunnel release surgery and care for your hand afterwards, covering what the procedure involves and what to expect during recovery.

Under the care of **Dr Brad Bidwell** · MBBS, BSc.(Hons), PhD, FRACS

## ABOUT THE CONDITION

# What is carpal tunnel release?

Carpal tunnel syndrome happens when the median nerve, which runs through a narrow tunnel at the wrist, becomes compressed. This can cause numbness, tingling, pain and weakness in the hand and fingers, often worse at night. When symptoms persist or are troublesome, surgery is a reliable way to relieve the pressure.

Carpal tunnel release is a small operation that divides the tight ligament forming the roof of the tunnel, creating more room for the nerve. It is usually done under **local anaesthetic** as a day procedure and typically takes around 15 to 20 minutes.

### What surgery can achieve

Releasing the nerve relieves the pressure that causes your symptoms. Night-time tingling often eases quickly, while numbness and strength can continue to improve gradually over several weeks as the nerve recovers.

## Before your procedure

### GETTING READY

- Tell the clinic about all medications, especially blood thinners, as advice will be given on whether to continue them.
- For a procedure under local anaesthetic you can usually eat normally beforehand. Follow any specific instructions you are given.
- Remove rings from the hand before surgery, and consider arranging someone to drive you home, as your hand will be bandaged.

## What to expect

- 1. Numbing the hand.** Dr Bidwell will clean the area and inject local anaesthetic into the palm and wrist. You may feel a brief sting, then the area becomes numb. You should not feel pain during the procedure, only some pressure.
- 2. The release.** A small incision is made in the palm, and the tight ligament is divided to free the nerve. The skin is then closed with stitches and a bandage is applied.
- 3. Going home.** You will rest briefly, then go home the same day with your hand bandaged and clear instructions on how to care for it.

## Your recovery at home

**First few days.** Keep your hand elevated as much as possible to reduce swelling, and keep the dressing clean and dry. Gently moving your fingers is encouraged to keep them supple. Take simple pain relief as needed.

**Healing and follow-up.** Stitches are usually removed after about 10 to 14 days. Avoid heavy gripping and lifting with that hand until Dr Bidwell advises. Some tenderness in the palm can persist for a few weeks and then settles as healing completes.

### When to seek help

Sedation and surgery are very safe, but contact the clinic or seek medical care promptly if, in the days afterwards, you experience:

- Increasing redness, swelling, warmth or discharge from the wound
- Fever, chills or feeling generally unwell
- Severe or worsening pain not eased by your pain relief
- Worsening numbness, or fingers that become pale, cold or discoloured (seek urgent care)

**If symptoms are severe or you are very unwell, call 000 or go to your nearest emergency department.**

## Contact the clinic

If you have any questions about your preparation, procedure or recovery, please get in touch, and the team will be happy to help.

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| <b>Practice</b> | Wangaratta General Surgeons                                            |
| <b>Location</b> | Wangaratta Private Hospital, 134 Templeton Street, Wangaratta VIC 3677 |
| <b>Phone</b>    | <b>(03) 5721 4366</b>                                                  |
| <b>Email</b>    | reception@drbradbidwell.com.au                                         |

*This guide provides general information only and is not a substitute for personalised medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given to you by Dr Bidwell and the clinic.*