

# Cubital Tunnel Syndrome

## What is it?

Cubital tunnel syndrome is a condition caused by pressure and traction on the ulnar nerve (funny bone nerve) on the inside of the elbow. Patients can experience numbness, tingling, and pain in the ring and small fingers, on the inside of the elbow and in the forearm.

## What Causes it?

1. Either an injury to the inside of the elbow or chronic pressure (such as supporting the arm by resting on the elbow) may lead to the formation of scar tissue over the ulnar nerve.
2. You may have been born with an unstable ulnar nerve that moves abnormally over the bump on the inside of your elbow. This also irritates the nerve.
3. Injury to the bones of the elbow joint may produce changes in the alignment of the joint. This may place tension on the ulnar nerve or narrow the size of the cubital tunnel.

4. Arthritis may produce swelling or enlargement of the joint which in turn narrows the cubital tunnel putting pressure on the ulnar nerve.
5. Ganglion cysts or an extra muscle may push on the nerve within the cubital tunnel.

## Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms usually are pain or numbness and tingling in the ring and small fingers. Patients may have difficulty sleeping and notice symptoms whenever their elbows are bent for long periods of time. They may experience occasional clumsiness, and may drop things. In severe cases, sensation may be permanently lost and the muscles of the hand can slowly shrink.

## Diagnosis

Your history and physical examination are most important to making the diagnosis. An X-ray may be taken to check for other causes of the complaints such as arthritis or a fracture. A nerve test may be done to check for other sites of nerve problems and confirm the diagnosis.

## Treatment

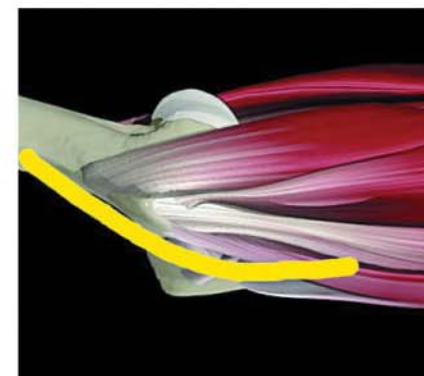
**Non-Operative.** Symptoms often are relieved without surgery. An elbow pad may decrease pressure on the nerve. You may be asked to sleep with it on backwards to prevent your elbow from bending at night.

**Operative.** When symptoms are severe or do not improve, surgery may be necessary. Pressure on the nerve is decreased by releasing the bands of tissue over the nerve. The nerve is then moved in front of the elbow to decrease tension on it when you bend your elbow. Following surgery, the numbness and tingling may decrease quickly

or slowly. Cubital tunnel symptoms may not completely go away after surgery, especially in severe cases.

Surgery is performed as an outpatient under general anesthesia. Patients are usually kept off of work for at least three days after surgery and then are allowed to return with no use of the operated arm. After 10-14 days, they are allowed to work with a 5 pound lifting restriction. Most patients are able to return to full duty by 6 weeks post-operatively.

## The Ulnar Nerve at the Elbow



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