

**Protocol W5
Physical or Occupational Therapy Protocol for
Carpal Tunnel Release**

Phase I: Protection Phase (weeks 0-2)

GOALS:

- Protect incision and allow for wound healing.
- Reduce swelling in hand and fingers.
- Prevent upper extremity joint stiffness.

ANCILLARY MEASURES:

- Use pain medication as needed.
- Keep operated hand elevated in foam arm cradle first 48 hours postop.
- If short-arm plaster splint, remove it one week postop and begin wrist motion.
- If removable short-arm splint, take it off periodically for wrist range of motion exercises beginning on third day postop.

EXERCISES:

- **Active and Passive Finger Motion:** Begin active finger flexion and extension in the recovery room and continue thereafter. May use the opposite hand to passively flex the fingers into the palm if necessary. Repeat 5-6 times per day.
- **Shoulder Range of Motion:** Begin progressive active shoulder range of motion in all planes. Complete 10 repetitions, 3 times per day.
- **Elbow Range of Motion:** Begin active elbow extension and flexion, 10 repetitions, three times per day.
- **Wrist Range of Motion:** Begin active and gentle passive wrist range of motion after splint is removed on third day postop.

PRECAUTIONS:

- Keep wound clean and dry.
- Do not soak hand in tub or pool until sutures are removed at 2 weeks postop.

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Phase II: Motion Phase (weeks 3-6)

GOALS:

- Maintain full ROM of shoulder, elbow, fingers.
- Achieve full ROM of the operated wrist.
- Decrease palmar pain.

ANCILLARY MEASURES:

- Discontinue full time splint at 2 weeks postop.
- May use splint periodically after 2 weeks to protect palmar scar.
- After sutures are removed, begin aggressive scar massage.
- Compression glove may be required to control palmar edema in some cases.

EXERCISES:

- **Continue all Phase I exercises.**
- **Wrist Range of Motion:** Continue progressive active and passive wrist range of motion to achieve full wrist motion by the end of this phase.
- **Grip Strengthening:** Initiate gentle hand strengthening by squeezing rubber ball, Silly Putty or Nerf ball. May progress to hand exerciser by the end of this phase.

PRECAUTIONS:

- Avoid pushing off with operated hand.
- Avoid use of vibrating tools.

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Phase III: Strengthening Phase (weeks 7-12)

GOALS:

- Maintain full ROM of wrist and fingers.
- Decrease palmar or pillar pain.

ANCILLARY MEASURES:

- Continue aggressive scar and palmar massage.
- Use gel pad for tender scar if needed.
- Use compression glove if needed.

EXERCISES:

- **Continue all Phase I and II exercises.**
- **Grip Strengthening:** Continue hand strengthening with a squeeze ball or hand exerciser.
- **Wrist flexion curl:** Sit with operated forearm resting on a table, hand extended over the edge of the table. Grasp a one pound dumbbell weight. With palm up, flex your wrist, curling the weight inward. Hold for 2 seconds, 10 repetitions.
- **Wrist extension curl:** Sit with operated forearm resting on a table, hand extended over the edge of the table. Grasp a one pound dumbbell weight. With palm downward, extend your wrist backward. Hold for 2 seconds, 10 repetitions.

PRECAUTIONS:

- Avoid pushing off with operated hand.
- Avoid repetitive overuse of the operated hand.
- Avoid use of vibrating tools. Anti-vibration gloves may be helpful if vibrating tools must be used in the work place.
- TENS is not indicated for pain management.