

# Joe Linn Massage Newsletter

July 2015

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

### Bodywork Treatment Proves Successful

Cathy Ulrich

It started as a vague feeling of numbness in her thumb and first two fingers, then progressed slowly to a definite tingling that woke her several nights a week. "It's not so bad on weekends when I have a chance to rest my arms, but it's now getting in the way of things I like to do at home," says Marie, who spends long hours during the work week typing at her computer keyboard. "I love to knit and cook, and I've had to curb these activities, as well."

Diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome, Marie displayed the classic symptoms: soreness in her forearms, pain in her hands at the end of a long day at the computer, and a feeling of tightness that had spread from hands and wrists all the

the same way many times a day over a long period of time, she has literally worn out the tissues involved in that motion. This type of injury -- called a repetitive strain injury, or RSI -- creates tiny tears in the fibers of the soft tissues of the body. While they don't immediately cause loss of function, these micro-tears set up conditions for chronic inflammation that will eventually manifest as pain, soreness, tightness, tingling, and burning.

### CTS

The hand and wrist combination work together as an amazing, mechanical anatomical wonder. Imagine a set of ropes and pulleys that travel from the

*Because it's  
summer and  
the memories  
are just waiting  
to happen.*

-Unknown



Working at a computer keyboard for long hours each day can bring on carpal tunnel syndrome.

way to her elbows. And recently, she'd been getting headaches.

Marie has a couple of different options for treating the problem. "My doctor tells me he can operate, but the surgery isn't always successful," she says. "He recommends I try bodywork first."

Because Marie does the same motion in

elbow through the wrist to the finger tips. The muscles reside in the forearm, moving the fingers via long tendons that run through channels in the wrist. The nerves that send and receive sensory and motor information from the brain run alongside the tendons through these same channels.

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#### Office Hours and Contact

**Joe Linn Massage**

**Joe Linn**

**415-497-3176**

**By appointment only**

**Hours available Monday - Saturday**

**Call today to schedule your massage.**

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When bending or straightening a finger, these tendons slide back and forth, just like cables. When continually working at a keyboard and using the same motion in the same position thousands of times a day -- like millions of Americans do -- the cables begin to wear. And just like threads in a rope, some of the collagen fibers will tear. This process progresses until enough fibers are torn that the body develops inflammation in the tendons and sheaths. Swelling ensues, which pinches the nerves, producing the classic symptoms of tingling, swelling, and even loss of grip strength.

## The Bigger Picture

The symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome may reveal an even bigger problem. The nerves that carry sensory and motor information to the hand arise from the spinal cord in the neck, travel under the collar bone, through the armpit and elbow, all the way to the wrist. A nerve can become entrapped at the neck, shoulder, elbow, or wrist, and an impingement in any of these places can have a cumulative effect on the tingling felt in the hands. These entrapments are usually caused by poor postural habits. The soft tissues become shortened around habitual positions of rounded shoulders and forward head from working long hours at the computer and the channels where the nerves travel through the shoulders and arms can close down. Sound familiar?

## Can Bodywork Help?

A recent study conducted at The Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine looked at the efficacy of bodywork in treating carpal tunnel syndrome. Researchers found that after the completion of four massage sessions, the participants experienced an improvement in grip strength and a decrease in pain, anxiety, and depression. Participants also showed improvement in specific medical tests used to diagnose carpal tunnel syndrome.

This landmark study verifies what bodyworkers have observed clinically for years: Massage -- and especially deep tissue techniques, such as neuromuscular therapy, Rolfing, and Hellerwork -- can reorganize the connective tissue fibers, break up scar tissue, and reduce or eliminate the cause

of inflammation. Soft tissue work helps realign these tiny fibers of the tendons and sheaths, and the body can then heal itself -- and ease or even eliminate carpal tunnel syndrome.

Bodywork to the entire arm, shoulder, and neck will also free soft tissues where hidden tightness can contribute to the problem. Soft tissue inflammation can travel through the continuous connective tissue framework from fingertips to head and even cause headaches -- as was the case with Marie. Massage can restore these tissues to normal function.

## Other Considerations

In addition to bodywork, it's important to evaluate postural habits, work station positioning, and movement patterns. When workers become so focused on their work that they forget their bodies, they tend to maintain positions that

contribute to the cause. It's important to identify several ways and several positions to accomplish the same thing. Moving the mouse from one side to the other, even during the same day, can help prevent fatigue and tissue failure. Wrist rests and keyboard trays are important, and a regular stretching routine is essential.

Finally, along with exercise and good nutrition, include bodywork as part of your regular health maintenance program. Regular massage reduces connective tissue inflammation and prevents scar tissue from forming. Movement education, such as the Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, structural integration, and Trager Approach can help correct postural issues that also contribute to the problem. Bodywork is a treatment of choice to keep carpal tunnel syndrome from slowing you down.



Massage and bodywork can help mitigate the symptoms of repetitive stress injuries, like CTS.

# De-stressing the Commute

## Turning Road Rage into Road Sage

The average American commuter spends an hour a day driving to and from work. During this stressful, stop-and-go time, it's likely that blood pressure increases, adrenaline begins pumping, and muscles constrict and tighten. By the time you get home, you're wiped out and grumpy, and you have less to offer to those you come home to. If this sounds familiar, recognize that you have the power to reduce commuter stress. Here are a few tips to make your commuter time contribute to -- rather than detract from -- your life.

- Employ adjustable back cushions, pillows, wedges, and lumbar supports for a more comfortable commute. For more information, check out [www.relaxtheback.com](http://www.relaxtheback.com).

- To successfully sidestep the late-afternoon slump often caused by the stress hormone cortisol, keep some healthy snacks within arms reach. Celery, string cheese, water, and nuts -- especially almonds -- are good options

for the drive home.

- Borrow books-on-tape/CD from the library. Consider purely entertaining novels to ease the intensity of your drive.

- Learn a foreign language. Libraries also loan out these types of tapes and CD, too.

- Use your commute as an opportunity for spiritual or emotional growth. When stressing about a traffic jam, remind yourself that it's completely out of your control. Remember, attitude is everything.

- Practice breathing. When stress occurs, breathing becomes shallow and constricted. Taking full, deep breaths gives the body more oxygen, helping to regulate physical and mental function. Exhaling fully releases tension and built up toxins.

For more ideas on achieving calm in a busy world, consider reading *Serenity to*

*Go: Calming Techniques for Your Hectic Life* (New Harbinger Publications, 2001) by Mina Hamilton.



**Creativity goes a long way on your commute.**

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# Somatic Semantics

## What Exactly is CAM?

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to healing modalities that don't fall into conventional Western medical philosophy, including bodywork, acupuncture, herbology, homeopathy and mind/body techniques. CAM is becoming a more familiar term as approximately 125 million Americans suffering from chronic illness -- arthritis, back pain, hypertension, and depression -- look for solutions that conventional medicine can't provide.

"Complementary" modalities are used together with conventional medicine, such as utilizing aromatherapy to lessen a patient's discomfort following surgery. "Alternative" modalities are used in place of conventional medicine, such as using herbs to treat stomach upset rather than taking pharmaceuticals. And the

merging of alternative and conventional medicine is referred to as "integrative medicine," connoting the idea of combining the best of both healing philosophies.

CAM is continually gaining the respect of the Western medical system, as indicated by the nearly 100 medical schools now offering courses in alternative therapies. The University of Arizona is an exceptional model of such a school, offering the nation's only postgraduate, two-year Program in Integrative Medicine (PIM). Founded in 1994, PIM is designed to teach small groups of physicians how to integrate holistic modalities into their practices. These doctors are committed to a fundamental redesign of medical education including such principles as: --Appropriate use of conventional and

alternative methods to facilitate the body's innate healing response; --Consideration of all factors that influence health, including mind, spirit, and community; --A philosophy that neither rejects conventional medicine nor accepts alternative medicine uncritically.

For more information and research about CAM, visit the nonprofit Alternative Medicine Foundation's website, [www.amfoundation.org](http://www.amfoundation.org).

*"Summer  
afternoon, summer  
afternoon; to  
me those have  
always been the  
two most  
beautiful words  
in the English  
language."*

-Henry James

Happy 4th of July!

Wow, this year is just flying by. I hope you are having as much fun as I am this summer.

In this month's newsletter "Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: Bodywork Treatment Proves Successful" covers an issue most of us suffer from. With all the time we spend on computers and phones doing repetitive tasks; it is no wonder. Be sure to let me know if you are experiencing any of the symptoms so we can work towards alleviating the pain and the strain.

"De-stressing the Commute: Turning Road Rage in to Road Sage" offers some great tips. Since the average American spends an hour a day commuting, and here you may be doing ever more, it is important to employ some of these practical tips. I have done my fair share of commuting over the years and books on tape were always a favorite.

"Somatic Semantics: What Exactly is CAM" covers what is happening in the current medical community in recognizing the importance and value of Complementary Alternative Medicine. I think it is great that more people are seeking alternate solutions to surgery and medication. I am also excited to know that young doctors are getting an opportunity to learn these modalities as well.

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