

GLOBE healthreport

New treatment halts carpal tunnel misery

LASERS COULD END CINDY MCCAIN'S PAIN

CINDY MCCAIN, the wife of Republican presidential candidate John McCain, needed treatment at a Michigan hospital after an enthusiastic fan shook her hand so hard, she aggravated her carpal tunnel syndrome.

The 55-year-old has previously had surgery to correct the painful disorder that affects one in five people, but experts say she would be better off using the latest technique to treat the problem, which can incapacitate the wrist.

It's called cold light laser treatment or CLL and can help relieve carpal tunnel syndrome effectively with none of the risks associated with surgery.

"Using laser is less invasive and requires no downtime after the treatment," says Dr. Glen Smith of Dallas, one of the pioneers of the technique, which uses light beams to reduce inflammation and pain.

"We usually start with daily treatments of approximately 15 minutes each and then reduce the number as the condition improves. I was surprised to read that Mrs. McCain has had surgery because in my experience it is not as effective as laser treatment and can cause scarring that further aggravates the condition."

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the central nerve of the forearm, which travels to the hand, becomes pressed or squeezed at the wrist. The sufferer experiences tingling, numbness and then sharp, shooting pains as the disorder progresses.



John McCain's wife Cindy has had carpal tunnel woe for years

The carpal tunnel, which is the space that houses the nerve, contains tendons that can become irritated and inflamed after repetitive movements, and this causes pressure on the nerve.

Computer workers, machinists and people who do repetitive manual work, such as manicurists, are typical victims of this aggravating disorder that can lead to decreased grip strength and numbness. Other causes can be injury to the wrist, arthritis and fluid retention in menopause or pregnancy. If left untreated, the muscles at the base of the thumb can waste away.

Cindy McCain chose to have corrective surgery, which involves cutting the band around the wrist, to release pressure and pain.

But Dr. Alan Lichtbroun, associate professor of rheumatology at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey, tells GLOBE, "I only recommend surgery in very severe cases of carpal tunnel because it leaves the hand much weaker than before."

"The Microlight laser is an FDA-approved method that helps the cells heal themselves and offers relief in more than 80 percent of the cases I've treated. Ideally, however, the sufferer should modify his or her activity after the procedure to prevent re-injuring the hand." - LYNN ALLISON

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Update

Indigestion drug brittle bone risk

+PEOPLE who take anti-acid drugs to battle indigestion may also be weakening their bones, warn Canadian researchers. A study of 60,000 people older than age 50 discovered that long-term use of proton-pump inhibitors is linked to osteoporosis later in life. Scientists at the University of Manitoba found that people who took the drug for more than five years had a 44 percent higher chance of a hip fracture. And the risk of a fracture shot to 400 percent when the drugs were used more than seven years.

Salmonella may fight cancer

+SCIENTISTS are genetically engineering the food-poisoning bacteria salmonella to fight cancer! In tests on lab mice at California's Burnham Institute for Medical Research, the altered germs reduced the growth of colon tumors by a whopping 82 percent and breast cancer by 59 percent. And in another study at the University of Massachusetts, all of the mice with tumors that were treated with the altered salmonella survived 30 days while those that weren't died within that same time span.

People look better when you drink!

+THE so-called "beer goggles" effect - people looking better through drunken eyes - has been scientifically proven by researchers in England. College students given the alcohol equivalent of a pint and a half of beer were about 10 percent more likely to find faces in photos attractive - even if they were the same sex. "Everyone knows about beer goggles," says University of Bristol psychologist Marcus Munafo. "But our results suggest that there's more going on than we might have thought."