

"Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients."

MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND

What is cyclist's palsy?

Cycling is a fun way to get around and stay active, but it can sometimes strain your body. Riding long distances with poor posture or an improperly fitted bike may lead to irritation in the nerves of your wrist. This condition is called cyclist's palsy or handlebar palsy. It happens when the ulnar nerve gets compressed in a small area of the wrist called Guyon's canal. The ulnar nerve passes through Guyon's canal and provides sensation and muscle power to specific areas of the hand



Riding long distances with poor posture or an improperly fitted bicycle can cause cyclist's palsy

What causes cyclist's palsy?

Cyclist's palsy happens when you hold onto the handlebars of a bike for too long, especially if your wrist is held in position for a length of time. This pressure increases when cycling downhill because your hands support more of your body weight. The vibration from the road and the pressure on your wrist can irritate the nerves, leading to cyclist's palsy.

What are the symptoms of cyclist's palsy?

- Pain, numbness, or tingling in the hands
- Weakness or cramping in the hand muscles
- A sharp, electric shock feeling at the base of the palm or in the ring and pinky fingers

In more serious cases, you might lose strength or movement in your hand. These symptoms can happen even when you're not cycling and may interfere with your daily activities and when sleeping.



Numbness and tingling is a symptom of cyclist's palsy, caused by entrapment of the ulnar nerve in the Guyon's canal as it passes through the wrist

What is the treatment for cyclist's palsy?

Doctors usually start with nonsurgical treatments like anti-inflammatory medicine, steroid injections or a referral to a hand therapist. They might also suggest adjusting your bike to reduce strain. If these treatments don't help, surgery may be needed to relieve the nerve pressure. After surgery, hand therapy can help restore movement and strength.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist can teach you ways to prevent cyclist's palsy by improving your posture, positioning and cycling habits. They may also provide stretches, exercises and tools to reduce nerve stress. If you've had surgery, a therapist will provide a program to address post-operative swelling and scar management, and issue exercises to improve motion, hand strength, coordination and sensory re-education.