

CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME (Part 5 of 10)

The Truth about Carpal Tunnel Syndrome



Today Cayman Net News continues the ten part series on Carpal Tunnel Syndrome written by **Barbara Currie Dailey**. This educational series will run daily until Friday 3 August. This series helps to dispel some of the myths related to this condition and includes an interview with a leading Carpal Tunnel Syndrome specialist, Dr Alejandro Badia MD, FACS, who is based in Miami Florida. It is hoped that this series will be a benefit to the population of the Cayman Islands

For the remainder of the series, attention is turned to an interview with Dr Alejandro Badia, who talks to Barbara Dailey about carpal tunnel syndrome, its misconceptions and who is at risk among other topics.

The Truth About Carpal Tunnel Syndrome - An Interview with Dr Alejandro Badia, MD, F.A.C.S.

Dr. Alejandro Badia is one of four internationally renowned orthopedic surgeons and one plastic surgeon specializing in surgery of the hand and upper limb, including shoulder at the Miami Hand Center in Miami, FL. He is also currently Chief of Hand Surgery at Baptist Hospital in Miami. Founded in 1991, The Miami Hand Center facilities include a state of the art outpatient surgical facility specializing in minimally invasive endoscopic and arthroscopic procedures.

Dr. Badia graduated from Cornell University in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physiology. He received his Doctor of Medicine degree from New York University in 1989 where he subsequently completed his internship in general surgery and residency in orthopedic surgery. He completed a fellowship in hand and upper extremity disorders at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. He was awarded a traveling fellowship in hand surgery in Europe through the AO Trauma Association. He frequently lectures at medical institutions and universities throughout the US and overseas, including the renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN.

An internationally respected authority on carpal tunnel syndrome, Dr. Badia authored the chapter "Median Nerve Compression Secondary to Fractures of the Distal Radius (Wrist)" in the comprehensive textbook "Carpal Tunnel Syndrome" edited by Luchetti and Amadeo. He has written numerous scientific articles related to carpal tunnel

syndrome, as well as arthritis of the thumb basal joint; wrist arthroscopy and management of sports injuries of the wrist, elbow and shoulder. Dr. Badia provided the following information during several interviews with local author and columnist Barbara Currie Dailey, a recent patient whose account of her diagnosis and treatment of carpal tunnel syndrome, and a related condition called trigger finger, appeared Monday to Thursday this week in Cayman Net News and can be accessed through the archive section of www.caymannetnews.com.

BD: Can you provide a simple explanation of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

DB: "The key to understanding Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is to think of it as a pinched nerve which occurs in the wrist and causes symptoms such as numbness or tingling in the fingers and pain and weakness in the hand. However, there are many other painful conditions of the hand and wrist. For that reason, it's important for anyone with those symptoms to be evaluated by a hand specialist to determine a proper diagnosis.

"The good news is that Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) is easily treated, especially when diagnosed in the early stages.

BD: Why is there so much confusion about Carpal Tunnel Syndrome today?

DB: "I hold the news media responsible for a lot of this. Ever since the term "carpal tunnel syndrome" was coined by Dr. George Phalen back in the 1950's the public has been confused by inaccurate reports that led to speculation about its cause and treatment.

"In spite of medical evidence to the contrary, the media have repeatedly branded this condition an occupational disease, or "repetitive stress injury," because of workers linking pain and numbness in their hands to repetitive activities such as typing or assembly line work. It is NOT a "repetitive stress injury;" it is not an injury at all. And this condition is not "caused by using a computer."

"Carpal tunnel syndrome became the subject of frequently sensationalized "medical news" reports during the last decade, coinciding with the rapid



Dr. Alejandro Badia

growth of computer use in the workplace and at home.

"Right away, people discovered ways to capitalize on and profit from the medically unproven "news" that carpal tunnel syndrome was a work-related "injury" caused by too much typing, prolonged use of a computer, or duties causing "repetitive stress."

"Furthermore, that misleading publicity spawned a multi million dollar industry devoted to "alternative" treatment and cures" many

of which are medically worthless in preventing a condition that has nothing to do with a particular activity or occupation.

"Regardless of medically proven facts, including published research findings easily obtained by any reporter, the media continued to recycle the same misleading, if not completely false information about CTS. Media outlets can be notoriously one-sided in covering the medical field, rushing to scoop a story before confirming the facts. And they are slow to admit, much less correct, their errors by presenting the truth.

BD: I understand you recently spoke with a producer at CBS network's 60 Minutes about this subject?

DB: "Yes, I did because it's time the media told the truth about carpal tunnel syndrome and corrected common public misconceptions they helped create. Since 60 Minutes is good at investigating controversial subjects—and CTS has been one for too many years—I hoped CBS could be part of the solution. By presenting the facts to millions of viewers the program could help debunk the prevailing myth that anyone who works on a computer or uses their hands for other work-related tasks that require repetitive movements is at risk of developing carpal tunnel syndrome. This is a complete fallacy.

"Not only has this erroneous belief interfered in the workplace, it has also prevented many people who don't fall into these categories from seeking proper diagnosis and treatment.

"But there's another important issue. It was my hope that 60 Minutes would expose the billion dollar cost to society that this pervasive misinformation about CTS has caused. While it is important that the public understand that this is an easily treatable condition and NOT caused by a particular job, it is even more important for our society to realize the eco-

nommic impact such false information has created.

"Blaming this condition on frequent computer use or repetitive workplace activities is a misconception that costs companies millions of dollars each year in lost productivity from employee sick leave and workman's compensation claims for a falsely labeled "occupational disease" whose diagnosis and treatment are simple and effective today. Unless treatment requires a surgical procedure, there is really no reason for most people to miss work at all. And with today's sophisticated surgical technology, the average office worker, for example, can return to work in a few days.

"Furthermore, in America's litigious society employers and computer manufacturers have also become easy targets for lawsuits based on the erroneous claim that carpal tunnel syndrome is a "repetitive stress injury." As I said before, medical research has proven this to be completely false.

"We've also seen the development of "ergonomic" design computer peripherals. This caused people to waste money replacing equipment, while manufacturers made hefty profits. While a wrist rest makes sense, most of those products are medically worthless in preventing CTS symptoms from becoming worse—contrary to their claims. You see how quickly we returned to the traditional design of keyboards, for example.

"In addition, there is a tremendous amount of quackery prevalent today, especially on the internet. Google "carpal tunnel syndrome" and you turn up a disturbing array of "alternative therapies," gadgets, creams and other medically unproven "cures" that are costly and worthless—and prey on people's ignorance. I've seen patients in my office who were afraid of treatment because of information they'd read online. Consequently, they delayed proper medical evaluation until their condition was extremely painful or even debilitating.

"In spite of all these points, especially the economic waste, they weren't interested in the story and that baffles me. I really believe that if their staff followed up with even a little investigative research, they would quickly realize how important this issue is."

In part 6 of the series Dr Alejandro Badia examines what causes Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and looks at some of the symptoms.