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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

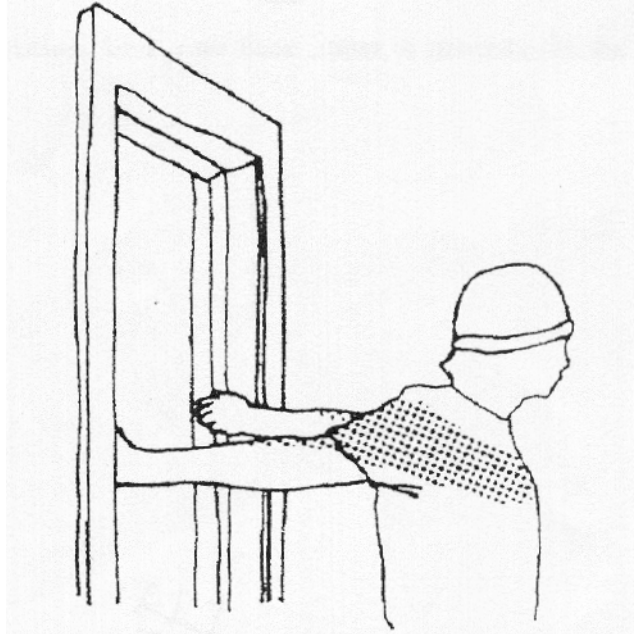
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## Waking Up With Numb Hands?

Are you one of those people who regularly wake up at night because your hands and lower arms have gone numb? You may find that it happens when you are sitting at a desk or even when driving long distances. This is commonly caused by compression of the nerves and blood vessels that enter the arm. The technical term is referred to as "thoracic outlet syndrome".

The neck portion of the spine, the cervical spine, has seven vertebrae. Passing inside of vertebrae is the spinal cord. Originating from the spinal cord, there are eight nerves. These nerves exit the spine between each of the vertebrae and combine into a large bundle of nerves. The bundle of nerves then pass under the chest muscles, through the shoulder, and down the arm. The primary job for most of these nerves is to control the pain or touch sensation and the contraction of the muscles of the arm.

When you sleep with your arm under your pillow or over your head, the bundle of nerves can become mildly stretched. Whenever this happens, they cannot perform their job very well. For example, if the hand is being touched, a message from the hand is sent through the nerves to the spinal cord and then to the brain. Your brain then consciously tells you that your hand is being touched. If the nerves become stretched, they cannot communicate their message to the spine properly. This will eventually make your hand and arm feel numb and weak. This can also happen to those of you that prefer to sleep curled up into the fetal position. Your arms are likely curled up tight in front of your chest. This position causes compression of the nerves as they pass through the shoulder and into the arm. The result, numbness in the arm and hand, will occur again for the same reason. If you spend too much time at the computer or drive for long distances, the muscles in the chest and shoulder can become very tight. This can also compress the nerves as they pass through the shoulder and give the same result of numbness. If these muscles are only mildly tight but not enough to cause numbness, the overall space that the nerves have to pass through is still less. If you combine this scenario with your arm in the previously mentioned sleeping positions, you are even more vulnerable to experience the numbness.



Hold onto both sides of the doorway with your hands behind you. If unable to do both at the same time, just do each arm individually. Lean forward slowly and let your arms straighten, causing the chest muscles to stretch. Hold for 15 seconds and do not bounce.

So how do you deal with this hand and arm numbness? First of all, avoid sleeping with your arms over your head or curled up in front of you. To alleviate the potentially tight muscles in the chest and shoulder, a simple stretch has been shown. Avoid a slouching posture, as the shoulders will roll forward and further decrease the available space for the nerves to pass through the shoulder and into the arm. If you are experiencing numbness into the arm or hand, you should also have your neck properly examined by a Chiropractor. Problems in the neck can cause symptoms very similar to Thoracic Outlet Syndrome.

As I mention every week, make sure you are treating the cause of your physical problems and not just the symptoms.