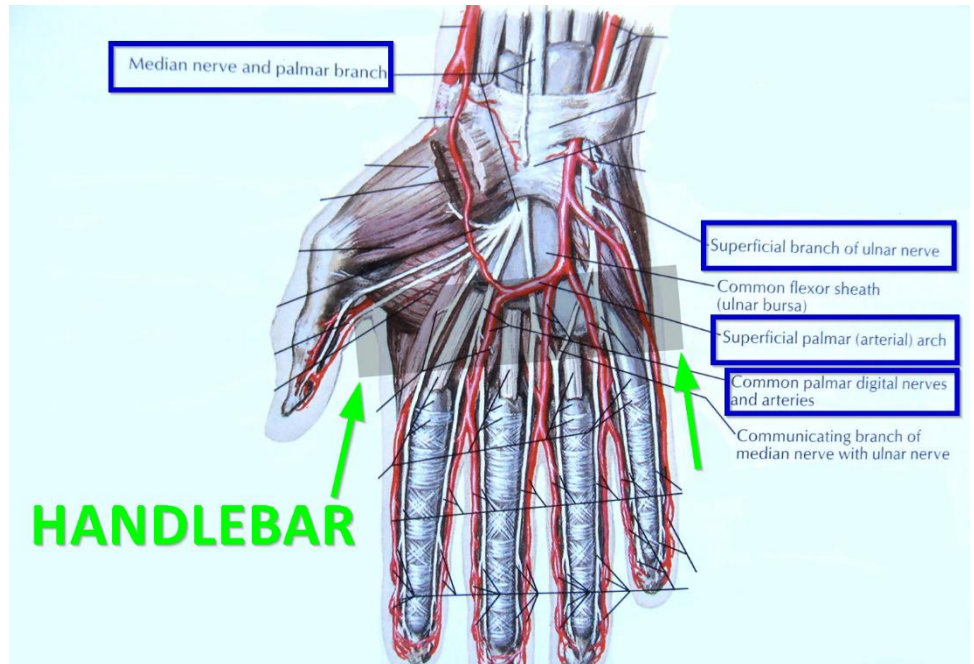


One question that I get asked all the time is this ... **“What causes my fingers [and hands] to go numb when riding?”**

Don't worry, you are not alone. During the past 4 years bike fitting, 75% of my clients have expressed that this is a real issue. There are 2 main possibilities for this. From my experiences speaking with cyclists, 50% are impacted by the first issue and 50% by the second, or a combination of both.

First and foremost is that you have too much pressure on your hand(s). This can be caused by a 'death-grip' on your handlebars or simply a bad bike fit or both. In both cases, you are pinching off the nerves (Ulnar Nerve Compression) and arteries that feed the fingers – see picture to the right. I have superimposed roughly where the (light gray) handlebar will contact the palm of your hand.



A. **'Deathgrip'** – what I mean by 'deathgrip' is that you are holding onto the handlebars so tight that you are pinching off the nerves and arteries that feed the rest of your hands and fingers. So just **RELAX!** By just relaxing your grip slightly, you will remove pressure that is pinching off the nerves and arteries.

B. **Vary your Hand Position.** Periodically, place your hands in a different position. Try moving your hands to the hoods, use the drops, rotate one hand at a time to the outside to rest the side of your palm on the handlebar, even flex your fingers/hands open and closed. If you are a little unsteady on your bicycle, move one hand to a different position at a time. This way you will always have at least one hand in a stable position on the handlebars all the time.

C. **Gel-Padded Gloves.** For example, to the right is pictured a perfectly designed glove is the Ultra Gel by Performance Bike. Any glove from Giro (i.e., LX) all have a similar design. I have outlined in red where the glove uses a gel padding therefore making the glove thicker in this area. So, what do you look for in a glove? Look for a glove that has a recessed 'pocket' that will protect your nerves and arteries from getting pinched. Also, for more comfort, look for a glove that has a little thicker padding.



D. **Double-Layer of Handlebar Tape.** See photo below. Here is a trick that no one really does, but really works. Next time you need to wrap your handlebars, Buy 2 packages of handlebar tape. For this trick, you will be using 3 of the 4 rolls.

- I. Open both boxes and set 2 full rolls aside – one each to be used on each side of the entire handlebar.

- II. Take a 3rd roll and cut it exactly in half.
 - III. At this point you should have 4 pieces, 2 full and 2 half pieces.
 - IV. Roll the tops of the hoods back (see photo).
 - V. Take one of the half pieces and starting at the back of the hoods, wind the tape around the handlebar until you get to about 1"-2" from the stem.
 - VI. Repeat for the other side.
 - VII. Once complete, you should have only the top of the bars covered with new tape.
 - VIII. Using one of the full-length pieces, wind tape around bars as normal.
 - IX. Once complete, the tops of the bars will have double padding and be very comfortable on the hands.
- E. **BIKE FIT** – Why a bike fit? Think of it this way. Sitting on a bicycle is like sitting on a teeter-totter. If the stem is too low, your weight is shifted forward and onto your hands, arms, shoulders and neck. When the stem is raised, your weight goes back onto your saddle, removing weight from your hands, arms, shoulders and neck. So, a pro-level bike fit is the way to go if you are wanting maximum comfort.



In addition, consult your doctor or physical therapist

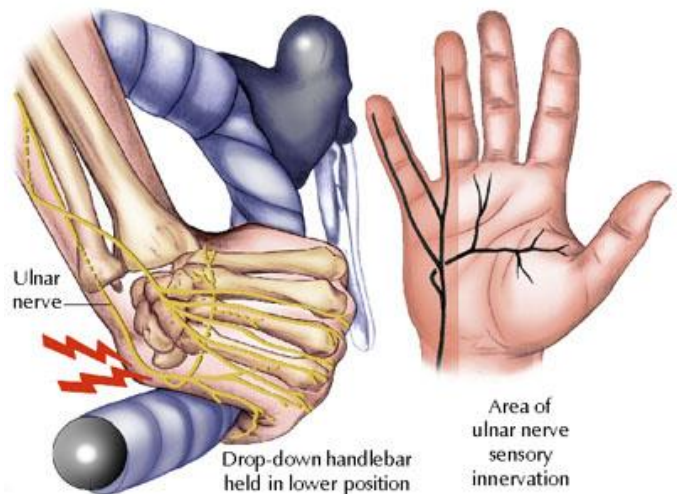
- F. **RICE** – Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation
- G. **MEAT** – Movement, Exercise. Analgesics, Treatment
- H. **Oral or Topical** non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs) to reduce pain and inflammation.
- I. **Wrist Splinting** – a wrist splint might help as it gives your wrist support and some compression.
- J. **Corticosteroid Injection** – for example Cortisone for treatment of inflammation.

In extreme cases,

- K. For severe nerve injury, **Surgical decompression** of the nerves may be needed. Consult your doctor.

Look at implementing some of the above.

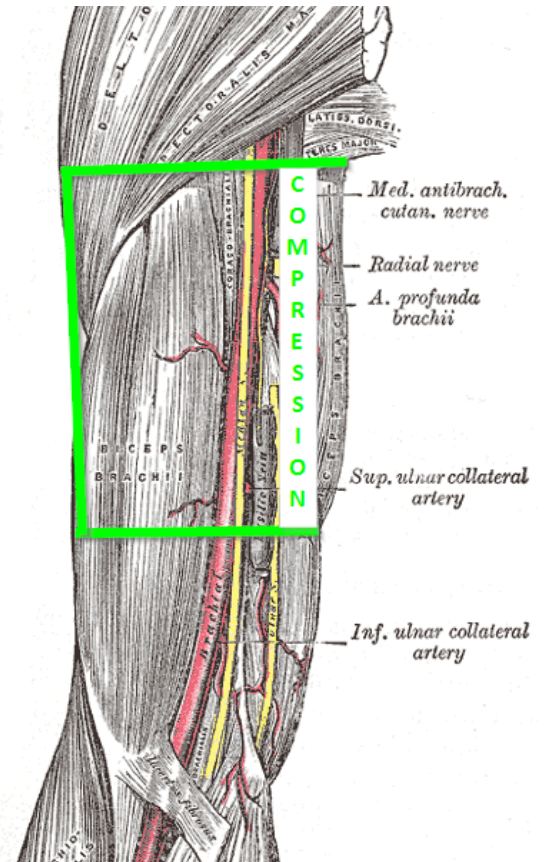
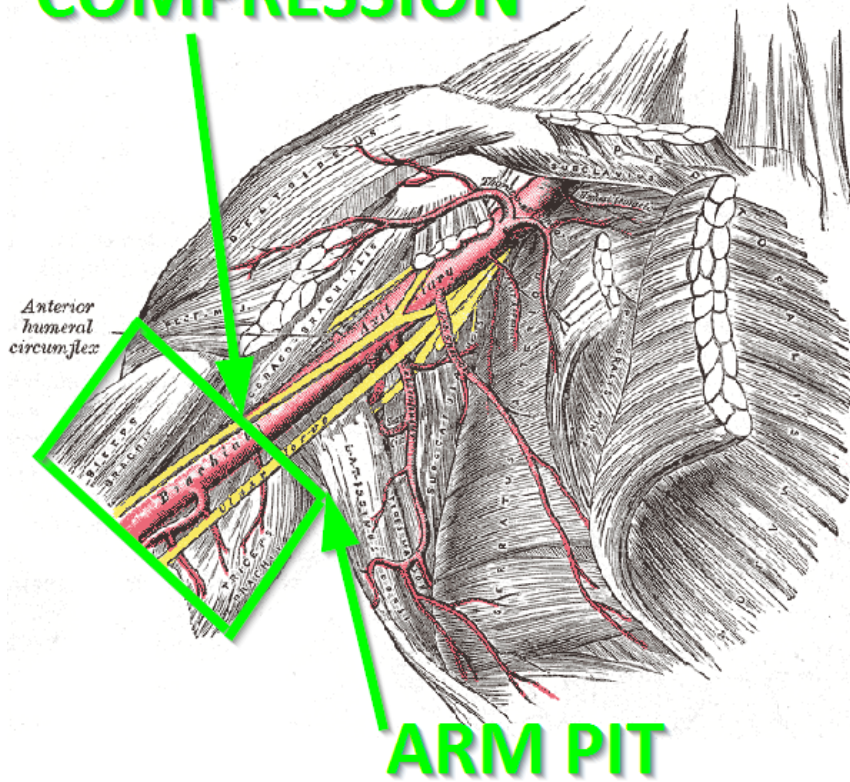
Second. Here's one that very few people have thought of but accounts for 50% of numb hands. What type of cycling kit are you wearing? Race-cut? Club-cut? Touring-cut?



I've noticed my fingers going numb only some of the time. Same course, same bike, same riding style, same position, the only thing that was different was the cycling kit, specifically the jersey.

One day my right hand and fingers were going numb. Since my jersey felt a little tight, I took my left hand and reached under my right armpit and pulled on the jersey to give it a little slack and immediately the numbness in my right hand and fingers went away.

COMPRESSION



Since, by design, cycling clothes are supposed to be aero meaning skin tight, for some of us, they are tight in the wrong places, like too tight around the upper arms. The elastic in the jersey compresses the Brachial artery and Ulnar nerve causing your hands and fingers to go to sleep.

So, next time one of your hands and/or fingers go numb, reach under your armpit and stretch out the jersey a little. I have told this to all my bike fit clients, and 50% of them have replied that this is the cause of their numbing.

The solution? Get a looser fitting jersey, especially under the armpits. Sometimes you might have to go up one size to make this work.

I hope this article helps you attain more comfort while cycling so that you can better enjoy the sport.

For Further Reading, see

1. https://www.physio-pedia.com/Cyclist%27s_palsy
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1478904/>