Staying Out of the Carpal Tunnel

Dear Problem Ladies:

Why are you ladies a problem? Okay, that's not really my question. Here's what I really need to know: what tips do you have to help a knitter who has carpal tunnel problems and wants to put off surgery as long as possible?

Carpal Tunnel Victim

Dear Carpal Tunnel Victim:

Even an online magazine will not give us enough column inches to answer your first question. The Problem Ladies have their share of problems. They're working them out on social media.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a serious and painful topic; we are throwing salt over our shoulder at the mere naming of it. If CTS persists and progresses, it can rob you of the joy of knitting. The Problem Ladies have had a few terrifying peeks into this abyss, and are happy to preach the gospel of wrist health.

Advice the first: If, all you experience are occasional mild twinges, take a day or two off, then resume knitting and see how you feel. Be honest with yourself. If it hurts after a rest, it's probably not going to go away, and you should see a doctor. Wear whatever nineteenth-century contraption she prescribes, no matter how ungainly. Take your doctor's advice, even if it is to stop knitting. If your wrists are restored to suppleness, you will knit again. If it gets worse, life as you know it will be permanently altered, and not just the knitting part. You need your hands and arms to work without pain
For knitters who have no twinges, here our are Wrist Health and Happiness Tips for Knitters:

1. Take short, frequent breaks. Shake out your wrists, positioning them lower than your elbows. If your wrists, elbows, or hands feel stiff even after you've rested, take the rest of the day off from knitting.

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2. Practice good knitting ergonomics. Keep your hands positioned no higher than the level of your elbows while you knit. Raising your hands above your elbows reduces circulation; you'll feel it. Check in with yourself mentally as you knit. Are you thinking about something stressful, and therefore clutching the needles more tightly than you need to? Stop it. Stop it right now. Keep checking and correcting yourself, until a loose hold on the needles becomes your knitting style. This may also improve your knitting—a vise-like grip slows you down and makes your stitches crampy.

3. Even when you're not knitting, treat your wrists and hands kindly. Take care with keyboards. Don't prop your head on your hand with your elbow on your desk (even though that looks adorable), and avoid bending your hand back toward the top of your forearm whenever possible. Be alert to ways that you might be overusing or putting undue pressure on your hands, wrists and elbows. Warm baths are good for all ills, including sore wrists and elbows. Ditto cold packs. Don't sleep with your arms pinned under your body or head.

That's all we've got. Let's never speak of this again. Tfu, tfu!

The Problem Ladies

Steeking the Unsteekable? We Say Yes

Dear Problem Ladies:

I've been wondering a long time about how to turn certain colorwork projects into something steekable. I've found a pattern I love and it looks totally feasible to steek it, except what does one do with the solid-colored sections? Would a bit of hand stitching suffice if the wool is sticky enough? Or is this totally unfeasible? Give me the truth—I can take it, I promise!

Astroknot

Dear AstroNUT:

The Problem Ladies might not be qualified to answer this question, but that has never stopped us from having an opinion. Ready? Here it is: The single-color sections of the steek will behave fine; they'll just be less bulky than the two-color sections.

If a mere steek isn't really crazy enough for you, work the solid sections in Fair Isle, using two

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strands of the same color. Isn't that just the coolest, most nearly metaphysical knitting idea you've heard in the last fifteen minutes? You can work a 3 x 3 checkerboard with invisible checks, and the solid sections would have the same texture and thickness as the Fair Isle sections, making it all hunky-dory. It would turn this sweater into all-seasons housing, that's for sure. If you look at your knitting as performance art, wearable philosophy, or a make-work project along the lines of the Egyptian pyramids, then you need to try this. If not, take a look at at Christina Harris's Whirlpool which has instructions for both steeked and not.

Happy Steeking,
The Problem Ladies

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NO.
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The Good, Solid No: How to Deliver It

Dear Problem Ladies:

I never know what to say when people ask me to make them something. I don't churn out hats the way I did B.C. (Before Children), and sometimes I just want to make something for myself. When people ask me to make things, I think it's because they don't know how long it really takes to go from yarn to garment. I don't want to educate them, but I do need an emphatic but polite way to say no.

Stephanie

P.S. If I had all the time in the world to knit, the answer would likely be yes to all requests.

Dear Stephanie:

The Problem Lady who grew up in the South struggles with this sort of thing all the time. After saying yes, over a period of many years, to all sorts of time-consuming, tedious, and unpleasant things often involving committees, she has learned that a good, solid "no" is the best bulwark. Her mother-in-law was the one who suggested that she learn to say no at least once every day, with no apology, and no explanation. Every day.

Easy to say, right? Why is this so hard to do?

The tricky part with knitting is that knitting is such actual fun. It's the thing we love to do. The person asking us to knit is someone we know, like, or love, so a request for knitting gets tangled up with powerful emotions such as I LOVE YOU or YOU ARE MY CHILD'S PRESCHOOL TEACHER. Everybody deserves a handknit, right? It's hard to deny people the thing they so obviously need.

Some people give away all their knitting. Some fierce types we know militantly reject the idea. "Nobody can understand how hard it is to build a sweater out of nothing, so forget it—this is something I'm doing for myself."

We think that your P.S. is an excellent way to get these moochy people off your case: "If I had all the time in the world to knit, I'd say yes. But I don't, so I'm sorry I can't."

Or, as the mother-in-law would put it: "No."

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The Problem Ladies

How to Stay on Task

Dear Problem Ladies:

I think it's time for us to talk about Knitter's Attention Deficit Disorder. "Oh, look—another lace pattern." "Oh look, titanium alloy dpns." Serious side effects include beyond-life-expectation stashing and unfinished project malaise. I say that as I labor through the last, very long color block of a shawl and keep repeating to myself: "Don't look at the next project. Don't look at your stash. Pass the knit shop, do not collect more yarn."

Schultheiss

Dear Schultheiss:

We're frankly awed that you have arrived at the last, very long color block of that shawl. And we are skeptical that you belong in the category of distracted knitter. Nobody with true Knitter's ADD gets to Row 150 of anything, particularly the...

Oh, man. In the time we have been mulling your question about Knitter's ADD, we have:

1. Wandered over to Ravelry.
2. Found a lace shawl like the one you mentioned.
3. Looked at seventeen versions of it.
4. Deep-thought the merits of laceweight wool yarn.
5. Wondered suddenly if you're joking about titanium dpns. You're not.
6. Explored the merits of Danish yarn.
7. Decided to move to Denmark.
8. Checked to see if the yarn shops in Copenhagen are great. They are.
9. House-hunted in Copenhagen.
10. Learned that *køkken* is the Danish word for *kitchen*.
11. Found a Danish house.
12. Wondered how much a Danish *krone* is.
13. Concluded that fifteen million of anything a lot.
14. Danish yarn is cheaper than a house overlooking the . . . What was that body of water called? Googled *Oursund*; found *Øresund*!
15. Looked forward to living by the water.

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16. Realized need for a bike in our new life in Copenhagen. Found a blog by a woman who likes Danish bikes. She also likes the White Stripes! She got to see their impromptu concert in Whitehorse, Yukon, in 2007.
17. Watched the concert on YouTube. And wondered why Jack White wasn't nice like this at his Radio City Music Hall concert.
18. Sure must be cold in the Yukon. He ought to be wearing a sweater.
19. Something cozy, like Whirlpool. Where did we see that thing recently?
20. Yikes—in this column we're writing!

The Problem Ladies