

# Carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy or post birth

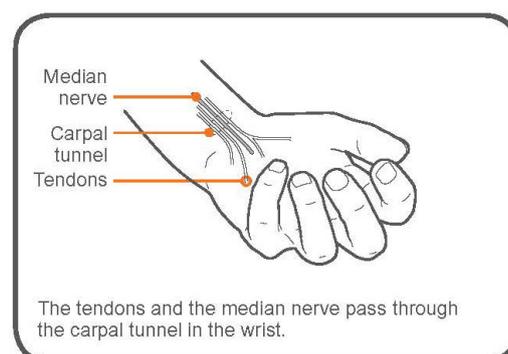
This leaflet is for women who have been diagnosed with symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy or immediately after delivery of baby. It provides information on reducing the symptoms and advice on where you can buy suitable splints.

## What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

The carpal tunnel is a passage made of small bones and a strong band of tissue, which tendons, blood vessels and nerves run through. These nerves control the sensation and movement in the hand and fingers.

During pregnancy the body retains more fluid which often causes swelling (oedema) of the hands and feet. Some women find the build-up of fluid around the wrist causes compression of the nerves running through the carpal tunnel, resulting in a change of sensation in the hand and fingers.

This is a fairly common condition during pregnancy and symptoms can range from mild to severe in one or both hands. Sixty percent of pregnant women have been found to suffer with carpal tunnel.



## What are the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy?

Symptoms include: numbness, pins and needles, pain, throbbing, dull ache, swelling, hot fingers, difficulty holding objects and decreased dexterity in the fingers. Symptoms are usually at their worst at night or early in the morning. These symptoms can be felt in the fingers, hand, wrist, forearm and shoulder in some cases.

Carpal tunnel usually resolves after delivery as fluid retention decreases. If this does not happen, please visit your GP.

## How to reduce your symptoms

- **Rest:** It is advisable to avoid overusing your hand, which can aggravate your symptoms. Try to reduce any non-essential activities and rest your hand on a pillow when you can.
- **Ice:** You can either use an ice pack on the area of pain or bathe your hands / wrists in cold water for approximately 10 minutes. Alternatively, you can switch from hot to cold (a minute each) for 5-6 minutes, i.e. an ice pack and then a hot water bottle.
- **Elevation:** Try and keep your hand and wrist elevated when resting and overnight to help reduce swelling.

- **Sleeping position:** Avoid sleeping on your affected side if the condition only affects one hand. Elevating your hand on a pillow while sleeping can help to keep you more comfortable, as can wearing a resting splint overnight. Hanging your hand out of bed and shaking it can help ease the pain.
- **Wrist support:** These are available from local pharmacies and should be worn when you are resting, particularly overnight. If unsure how to fit them, your physiotherapist can advise
- **Exercise:** After a period of rest, try to exercise the hand to improve circulation and decrease swelling.

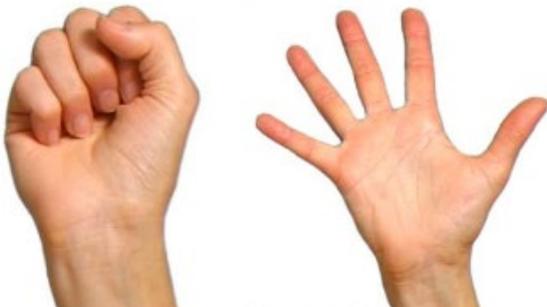
## Carpal tunnel exercises

### Wrist flexion and extension



- Rest your forearm on a table at a comfortable height, with your hand over the edge of the table.
- Lift your fingers and bend your wrist up.
- Bend your fingers and wrist down.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Progress this by holding a light weight when lifting your wrist.

### Finger flexion and extension



- Hold your arm in a comfortable position.
- Make a fist.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Progress this by squeezing a soft ball to provide some resistance.

### Finger opposition



- Rest your hand in a comfortable position.
- Put your thumb against each fingertip in turn.

## Further information and advice

Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team  
Royal Berkshire Hospital  
Craven Road  
Reading RG1 5AN

*\*Photos courtesy of PhysioTools*

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

J Churches, Band 6 Specialist Physiotherapist, 2015

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