

**Department of Physiotherapy**

This leaflet should be used by specific individuals following physiotherapy assessment. If you have any concerns, please speak to your Physiotherapist or GP.



# **Carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy**

Information for patients

---

## **What is the carpal tunnel?**

The carpal tunnel is where the bones and ligaments of the wrist form a narrow tunnel shape at the front of your wrist. Muscle tendons, blood vessels and the main nerve to your hand (the median nerve) pass through this space.

## **Carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy**

Carpal tunnel syndrome is common in pregnancy and can affect up to 60% of women. It usually occurs in the last few months of pregnancies, but can occur at any time.

During pregnancy your body is more likely to retain fluid and this can occur within the carpal tunnel. The carpal tunnel is a small space and any swelling in the area can cause pressure on the nerve which can stop it working properly and also cause reduced blood flow to your hand. When this happens you can get tingling, pain and numbness in your thumb and fingers of one or both hands.

Symptoms can be mild to very painful, but usually resolve shortly after giving birth. If your symptoms persist, please consult your physiotherapist or GP.

## **What are the symptoms of carpal tunnel?**

- Usually worse at night and first thing in the morning
- Numbness and tingling in the thumb, fingers, wrist and hands
- Pain or throbbing in the thumb, fingers wrist and hands
- Swollen, hot fingers and thumb
- Difficulty gripping objects and performing fiddly tasks for example typing or doing up buttons
- If you are experiencing reduced feeling in your fingers and thumb, you should be careful during certain activities. Make sure you have a good grip when carrying hot water, using a sharp knife or drying glasses.

## What can I do to ease my symptoms?

### Rest

Over using your hands may increase your symptoms – particularly avoid small repetitive movements of the wrist such as typing. Try to reduce non-essential activities where possible and raise your hands and wrists on a pillow whenever you can.

When able, avoid carrying heavy shopping bags or objects which may cause further swelling within the carpal tunnel.

### Ice

Apply a small ice pack to your wrist for 10 minutes or run your wrist under a cold tap. You can also alternate between ice pack and comfortably warm water for 1 minute at a time, for 5-6 minutes. You can do either of these 3-4 times per day. **Please be careful if you have reduced feeling in your wrist and fingers when you are using ice or hot packs.**

### Elevate

When you are resting, elevate your affected arm(s) on a pillow to reduce swelling.

### Splints

Wearing wrist splints may help your symptoms, particularly overnight. This will stop you from bending your wrist while you are sleeping. If your symptoms continue into the daytime, you can also wear the splint during the day.

You can buy wrist splints online or they can be sourced at your local pharmacy. Make sure you buy the correct size for your body, and monitor your skin for any changes to colour or swelling.

### Exercise

This helps to reduce swelling and maintain your movement

1. Gently bend and straighten your wrist. Repeat 10 times
2. Gently stretch out your fingers and then make a fist. Repeat 10 times
3. Touch the tip of each finger with the tip of your thumb. Repeat 5 times with each finger
4. Slowly bend your elbow, taking your hand towards your face and then straighten your arm. Repeat 10 times.

## Useful links and websites

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome)

[www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome](http://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome)