

Patient Information Leaflet

# Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in Pregnancy



**Physiotherapy Department**

Hospital: .....

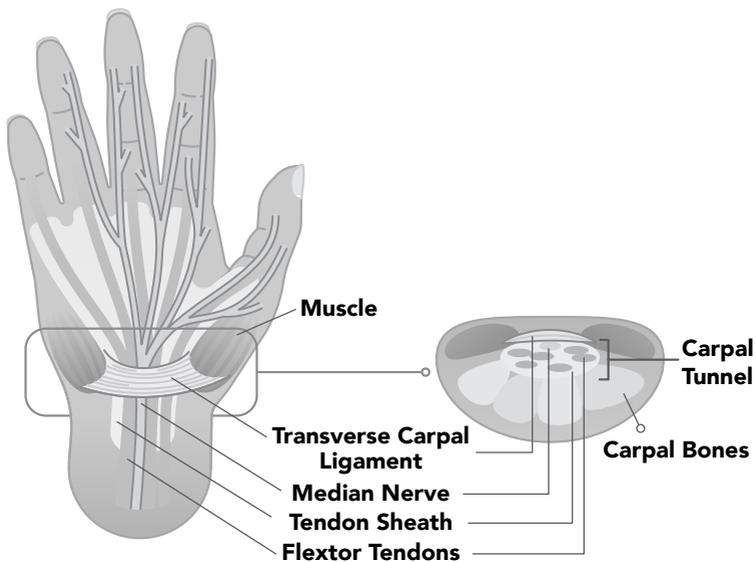
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# What is the Carpal Tunnel?

The carpal tunnel is a passageway, which tendons, arteries and nerves pass through in order to supply function and movement to the fingers and wrist.

The Carpal Tunnel is about the size of the index finger in diameter and the tendons, arteries and nerves are expected to glide past each other through the carpal tunnel.

An accumulation of fluid in the carpal tunnel will make this little space tighter so that the pressure builds up on the median nerve. The swelling caused by this has no place to expand since it is encircled by bones and ligaments, consequently because the swelling is contained pressure builds in the median nerve, preventing the nerve from functioning properly.



## Symptoms in Pregnancy

In pregnancy raised levels of hormones are necessary to keep the pregnancy healthy. One of the results of all this is a gradual accumulation of extra fluid in all parts of the body. It is the extra fluid and swelling which occurs in tight spaces particularly the hands, which causes nerve compression.

The symptoms are usually pain, numbness, pins and needles and tingling in the fingers and hands. There may also be some swelling in the fingers.

The hands may become clumsy, weak and tire easily. It may become difficult to perform some every day hand movements, e.g. washing up, eating, doing up buttons or picking up small objects.

## Self Care

Make sure any rings you are wearing can be easily removed. If your fingers are very swollen then the rings become tight and restrict circulation - so take them off.

Try not to carry heavy shopping. Gripping bags for a long time with clenched fists will make you uncomfortable and could increase swelling.

## Physiotherapy Treatment

In the early stages of Carpal Tunnel a simple wrist splint will sometimes decrease the symptoms especially the numbness and pain occurring at night.

These splints simply keep the wrist in a neutral position (not bent back too far nor bent forward too far). When the wrist is in this position the carpal tunnel is as big as it can be - so the median nerve has as much room as possible to pass through the tunnel.

The splints worn at night prevent the hand bending whilst asleep. These are quite comfortable to sleep in and can also be worn during the day if it helps.

Finger and wrist exercises can improve the circulation and relieve stiffness. Place arms on a few pillows or cushions to raise them up a little then:

- Clench and unclench fingers
- Bend and stretch wrists
- Circle wrists 10 times each.

Ice packs several times a day can ease symptoms. Make your own packs by crushing ice cubes or use frozen peas. Place in a plastic bag, wrap in a damp towel and apply over the front of the wrist for 5-10 minutes.

## If the Symptoms Increase

### Before going to bed:

Put hands in ice cold water with fingers stretched open and count to ten. Remove hands from water then clench and unclench fist vigorously ten times.

**Repeat these ten times.**

### Muscle pumping exercises:

Hands above head open and close fingers ten times.  
Circle wrists left and right ten times. Bend and stretch your hands backwards and forwards ten times. Then put splints on.

### In the morning:

Put hands in warm water, open and close fingers making a fist. Do this until you can obtain full range of movement. Use hands as normally as possible throughout the day.

## Aftercare

Almost all sufferers find the symptoms disappear a few weeks after the birth. If symptoms persist make an appointment to see your GP.

### If you wish any further advice please contact the Physiotherapy Department:

Princess Royal Maternity: ☎ 0141 201 3432

Queen Elizabeth University Hospital: ☎ 0141 201 2324

Royal Alexandra Hospital: ☎ 0141 314 6765

Physiotherapy website Link:

🌐 [www.nhsggc.org.uk/obstetricsphysiotherapy](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/obstetricsphysiotherapy)