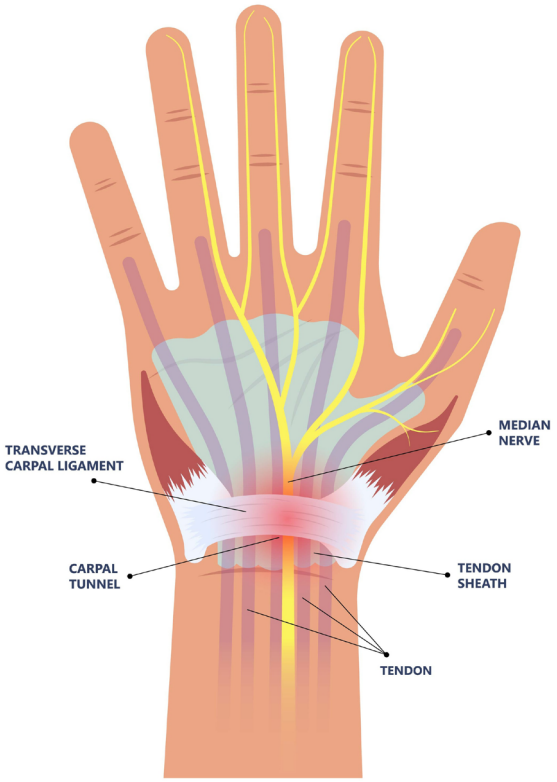
Patient information factsheet

Carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy

We have given you this factsheet because during your pregnancy you have developed a condition called 'carpal tunnel syndrome'. It explains what carpal tunnel syndrome is and the steps that you can take at home to help reduce your symptoms. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

The carpal tunnel

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passage in the wrist, formed by small bones and a band of tissue. It consists of tendons, blood vessels and nerves, including the median nerve which controls sensation and movement in the hand. If the median nerve is compressed or squashed in any way, it can cause carpal tunnel syndrome.



Carpal tunnel syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition that causes a tingling sensation, numbness and sometimes pain in the hand and fingers. It can sometimes occur during pregnancy.

Carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy

During pregnancy, swelling in your hands is caused by a build up of fluid (oedema) in the tissues. Some of this fluid can collect in the carpal tunnel, placing pressure on the median nerve, compressing it and causing tingling and numbness in your hands and fingers.

It is common for pregnant women (60 in every 100) to experience symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome. Symptoms vary and can range from mild to very painful, and may affect one or both hands.

Carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms include:

- numbness and tingling in the fingers, hands or wrists
- pain or throbbing in the fingers, wrists or forearms
- swollen, hot fingers and thumbs
- reduced strength when gripping objects and performing fiddly tasks, such as buttons or zips

Techniques to help reduce your symptoms

- **Rest** - Overusing your hands may increase your symptoms. Try to reduce non-essential activities where possible and rest your hands and wrists on a pillow whenever you can.

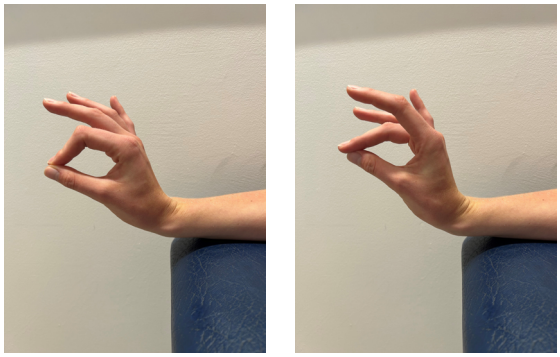
- **Ice** - Apply a small ice pack to your wrist for ten minutes or run your wrist under a cold tap. Alternatively, you may find alternating between hot and cold helps. Alternate between a basin of cold water and a basin of warm water, or some frozen peas and a hot water bottle (wrapped in a tea towel) for one minute each, for five to six minutes. You can try these suggestions three to four times a day.

- **Elevation** - When resting, keep your forearm and hand elevated by propping it up with a rolled up towel or pillow. This will help to reduce the swelling.

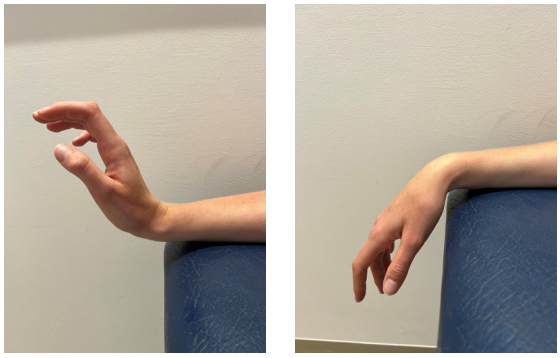
- **Exercise** - Rest is important, but it's also important to exercise your wrists and hands. The exercises below may help.

Carpal tunnel exercises

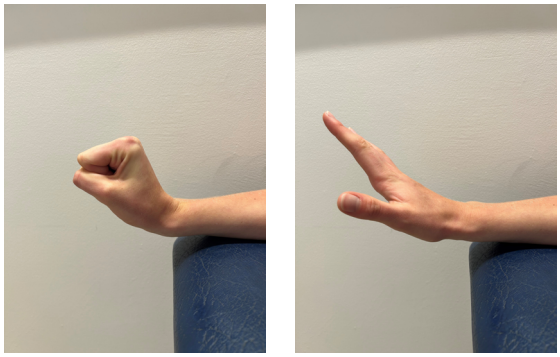
1. Touch one finger at a time with your thumb, making an 'O' shape. Repeat this 10 times.



2. Rest your forearm on a table with your hand relaxed over the edge. Bend your wrist up and down. Repeat this 10 times.



3. Make a fist then straighten your fingers. Repeat this 10 times.



Splints

Wrist splints (available at pharmacies) can be worn at night-time to stop your wrists bending. We can advise you on fitting and using wrist splints.

After your baby is born

The symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome tend to go away within the first few weeks after your baby is born.

Contact us

If your symptoms persist, or you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

Women's health physiotherapy team
Telephone: **023 8120 8829** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm)

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