

Managing carpal tunnel syndrome in your hand during pregnancy

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

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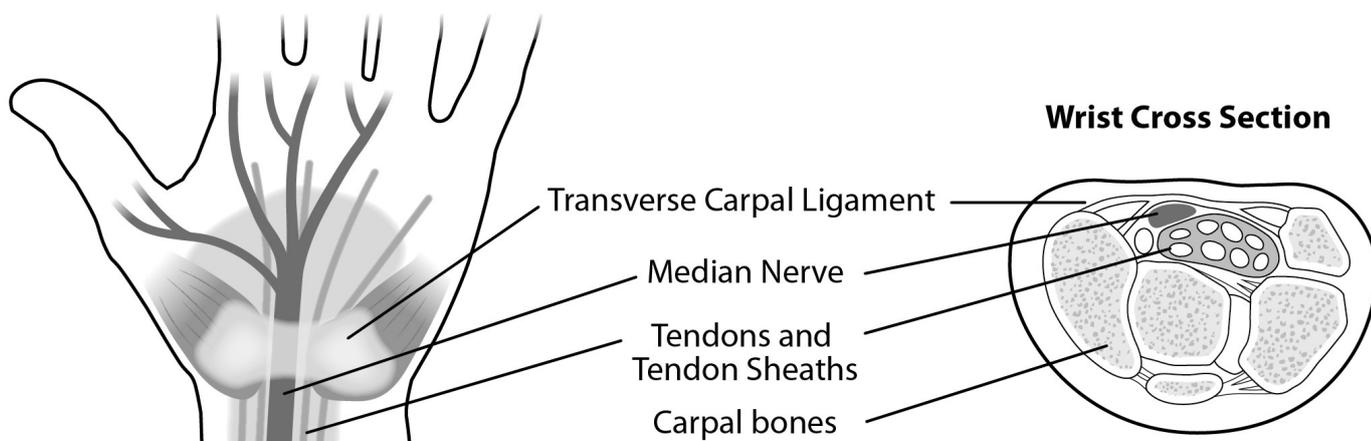
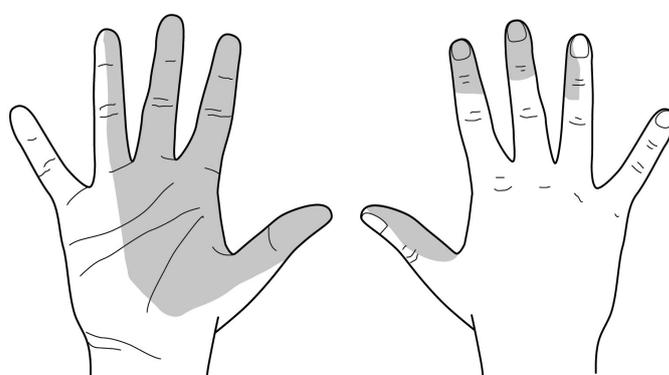
What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition which causes pain, and sometimes tingling, numbness and weakness in the hand, wrist, and arm.

Symptoms are usually worse at night and first thing in the morning.

This area is supplied by a large nerve, called the “median” nerve, which can get squeezed at the wrist.

The nerve goes through a small space between the bones in the wrist, called the carpal tunnel, on its way into the hand. This space also has some tendons running through it, which can squeeze the nerve when you are gripping or lifting things. When the nerve becomes squeezed it can cause pain, tingling, numbness, and sometimes weakness.



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What causes carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy?

During the middle and later stages of pregnancy the body keeps more fluid. This often causes swelling in the hands and feet. The build-up of fluid around the wrist can cause the median nerve to become squeezed.

Being overweight, a previous injury, doing repetitive tasks or heavy lifting can also make it worse. Symptoms usually improve after giving birth as the swelling goes down.

What can be done to ease the pain?

A wrist support, or splint, like the one in the picture below can be worn at night, and sometimes during the day when doing things that bring on your pain. Take the splint off during the day and keep your wrist moving as much as you can.

Keep using the splint after having your baby until your hand returns to normal. This will help to rest the nerve and allow the pain to settle.

These splints can be bought in larger chemists or from online suppliers.

- Try to keep your wrist in a straight (neutral) position and avoid bending your wrist forwards or backwards too far when doing things during the day.
- Take regular rests from repetitive jobs, for example, housework, lifting, carrying, using your phone, typing or gripping the steering wheel when driving.
- If you have pain in only 1 hand, avoid sleeping on that side. Try sleeping with hands slightly raised on a pillow.
- Rest with your hands raised and elbows resting on a pillow throughout the day, and gently keep your fingers moving.
- To reduce swelling, bathe hands alternately in warm water then cold water, or use ice packs wrapped in a towel for 20 minutes a couple of times a day.
- Gentle massage starting from the finger tips in a downwards direction with your hand raised, will help reduce swelling.
- Exercise the wrist and hand gently after any period of rest to improve circulation and reduce swelling.



Nerve and tendon gliding exercises

Normal movement of the hand and arm does not usually result in pain. In carpal tunnel syndrome, the median nerve is under extra pressure and this can produce pain. Exercises may help to improve blood flow, reduce swelling, and help to reduce pain. Exercises can also help to keep the tendons and nerves moving properly in the carpal tunnel.

Doing the exercises in the pictures below should help to reduce your pain:

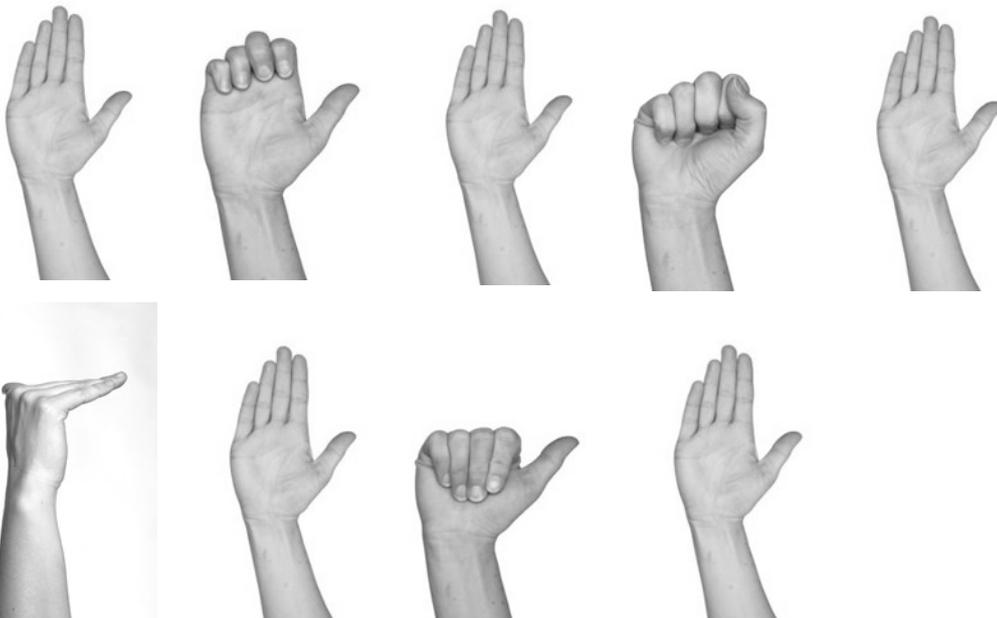
1. Start each stage with a flat hand as shown in the first picture.
2. Bend finger joints, keeping knuckles straight, then straighten.
3. Form a full fist, then straighten.
4. Bend knuckles, keeping finger joints straight, then straighten.
5. Bend knuckles and middle finger joints to touch your finger tips onto the palm, then straighten.

How often should I do the exercises?

It is important not to over-stretch the nerve whilst exercising or your pain may get worse. Do these exercises at a quiet time when you can concentrate. You should feel some tension in your hand and wrist when doing these exercises, but your symptoms should not get worse.

For the exercises shown below:

- perform them 3 to 5 times per day.
- hold each position for 5 seconds.
- do 10 repetitions per session.
- stop if your symptoms get worse.



Contact details

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Tel: 0116 258 4070 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30 pm)

Further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/>

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/>

If you have any questions, write them down here to remind you what to ask:

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