

Department of Women's Health Physiotherapy

Carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy -

Patient information sheet



What is the carpal tunnel?

The carpal tunnel is an inelastic structure located at the level of the wrist.

Many tendons which move the thumb and fingers pass through this carpal tunnel on their way to the hand. A nerve called the median nerve also sits in this tunnel with the tendons, so there is very little room.

The nerve is responsible for giving you feeling in the thumb and fingers, and also makes the tendons work properly.

Why does it happen in pregnancy?

Hormone changes during pregnancy can cause swelling in many parts of your body including the wrist and carpal tunnel.

Any swelling will increase the pressure on the median nerve inside the tunnel. This pressure on the nerve causes the symptoms known as carpal tunnel syndrome. Symptoms are most likely to occur from the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy.

What symptoms may you experience?

You may feel one or more of the following symptoms:

- Pain, pins and needles, numbness or burning in the thumb, index middle or ring fingers

- Tingling or numbness of your entire hand
- Weakness in the hand and forearm
- Pain that shoots from your hands up the arm as far as the shoulder
- Your symptoms may be worse at night or first thing in the morning
- You may drop objects
- You may have trouble performing dextrous tasks such as writing because of reduced grip
- Your Hands may be are swollen, hot and sweaty

How to manage carpal tunnel syndrome?

- Speak to your pharmacist or GP about medication that may help your pain but is safe to take throughout pregnancy.
- We suggest you wear the splint at night or during static postures.
- Elevate your arms with pillows or cushions when lying or sitting down – this can help to reduce swelling in the tunnel.
- Try to pace and modify your day to day activities, and avoid any aggravating movements.

How long will it last?

Carpal tunnel syndrome usually improves after your pregnancy ends, but can take some time whilst your hormones settle. We advise to give at least 3-6 months post-natally.

If you do continue to have problems that do not settle, contact your physiotherapist or GP for further advice. You may require a referral to a Hand surgeon.

What to look out for?

If you notice any of the below please contact your GP or physiotherapist;

- Worsening pain levels
- Symptoms become constant in nature (not just at night or with prolonged activity)
- Symptoms of pins and needles or numbness increase.
- Any worsening weakness or wasting in the muscle of the hand and thumb.

Please contact your Physiotherapist if you have any questions:

Name of your Physiotherapist: _____

Contact Tel: _____