

Fact Sheet

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

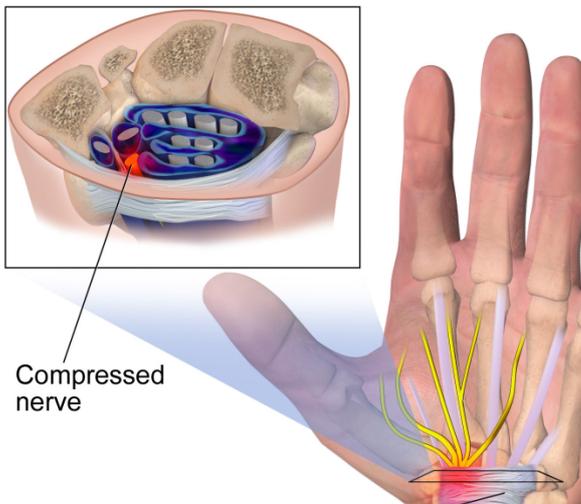
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What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is the name given to a condition which causes pain, tingling (pins and needles), stiffness and sometimes weakness in the wrist, fingers and thumb. CTS is common in pregnancy with 30-50% of pregnant women experiencing some of these symptoms.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome and why is it common in pregnancy?

The carpal tunnel is a small passage in the wrist where tendons and a nerve (the median nerve) pass into your hand and fingers. During pregnancy the increased hormone levels may cause you to retain more fluid and



Compressed nerve

the ligaments may become softer which can affect tunnel size. As a result the nerve may become squashed as it passes through the tunnel causing symptoms.

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Carpal tunnel syndrome may affect one or both wrists. It is most common during the last few months of pregnancy, but may also occur after childbirth.

For most women, symptoms will resolve after childbirth. Safe and effective treatments are available at any stage of pregnancy or beyond.

What are the common signs and symptoms of CTS?

The areas of the hand most affected by the symptoms are the thumb, index and middle fingers and the symptoms include:

- pins and needles, or tingling
- numbness
- pain
- weakness in the hand, such as difficulty with turning a key or opening a jar
- burning sensations into the hand
- the symptoms may be worse at night

Swelling can be a symptom of high blood pressure in pregnancy (Pre-eclampsia), so inform your doctor or midwife if you have excessive swelling in your hands or feet.

What can you do to help?

- Tell your midwife or doctor what you are feeling
- Seek Hand Therapy treatment early to ensure this condition is managed well and you are comfortable while preparing for the arrival of your baby
- Avoid any positions or activities that make your symptoms worse
- Elevate your hands when able
- Avoid sleeping with your wrist bent under your chin or sheets
- Keep your wrist in neutral (meaning a midline position), thus avoiding positions where it is bent forward or backwards
- Ensure you keep good wrist and arm posture whilst working on a computer
- Take frequent breaks, every 20 minutes, if you are working on a computer

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What treatment options do I have?

There are safe and effective treatment options available.

Hand Therapy (Physiotherapy/Occupational Therapy) may include provision of a brace or splint to wear at night and/or during the day to keep your wrist in a neutral position.

Splints need to be individually fitted or custom made by a therapist to ensure the correct wrist position is achieved for the most benefit.



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Your therapist will also provide education about posture and recommendations for changes in activities and exercise.

What happens if you still have symptoms after the birth of your baby?

Most women's symptoms will reduce (become less) after birth. However if your symptoms persist it is important you discuss this with your doctor, midwife or therapist.

It is important to keep your wrist in a neutral position whilst feeding your baby. Your midwife or therapist can show you some positions and strategies to help with this.

If you continue to experience symptoms 6 weeks after your baby is born you should discuss this with your GP who will examine you, and check your thyroid functions tests, and refer you to a specialist should he or she feels it is necessary.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in pregnancy is very common and although the symptoms are uncomfortable the available treatments are helpful and in over 95% of cases the problem settles down within 6 weeks of your baby being born. Please don't hesitate to talk with your doctor, midwife or therapist about any concerns you may have.

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

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