



Carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy

A patient's guide

This leaflet provides information about carpal tunnel syndrome during pregnancy. It aims to explain the diagnosis, symptoms, and possible treatments.

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1. What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by compression (squashing) of the median nerve in the carpal tunnel, a space at the base of the hand and thumb. During pregnancy the body retains more fluid causing swelling (oedema) in the feet and hands and this commonly leads to compression of the nerve and tendons. Symptoms can include pins and needles, numbness, pain, and reduced strength in one or both hands. Symptoms are often worse during the night or in the morning.

In most cases, carpal tunnel syndrome resolves after baby is delivered and the fluid retention decreases (see below for postnatal advice).



2. How to reduce your symptoms:

Rest – avoid overusing your hand, doing repetitive tasks and awkward wrist postures. Reduce the amount of time on your phone (use hands free) and ensure a good set-up when using your computer with a mouse and your forearm supported. Take regular breaks.

Ice – use an icepack wrapped in a tea towel on the affected area for 10 minutes. Alternatively bathing your hands in cold water can help. Contrast bathing is another method where you alternate bathing your hands and wrists between warm and cold water to help reduce swelling, spending 1 minute in each and alternating for 6 minutes.

Elevation – keep your hand elevated when resting and at night higher than the level of the heart to help reduce swelling. Try resting with your hands on pillows.

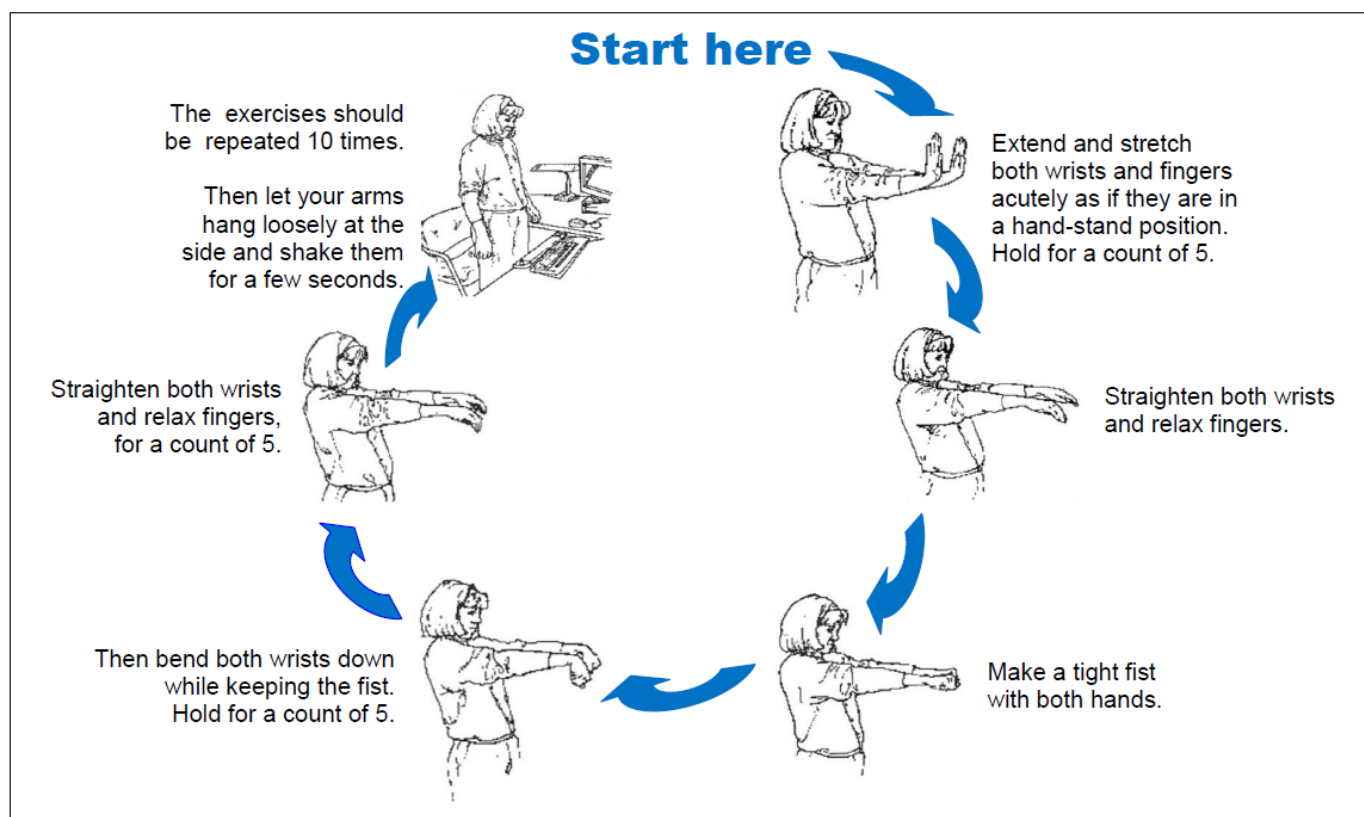
Sleeping positions – during pregnancy it is recommended to sleep on your side but to avoid sleeping on your hands or with your wrists flexed (bent) awkwardly. Best to sleep with your hand(s) on a pillow and wear wrist splint(s) (see below).

Carpal tunnel wrist support with metal – these can be purchased online or from local pharmacies. Wearing wrist splints at night can help to reduce pain and swelling.



3. Exercises:

If the pain is not too severe and after some rest, exercises can help to improve circulation and reduce swelling in the wrists. You can do these exercises 1-2x per day.



4. Postnatal advice:

Usually, symptoms will subside after 6 weeks following the birth of your baby as the hormones and fluid levels return to normal. However, you need to protect your wrist and hands in the first few weeks postnatally to allow the muscles to strengthen to help look after your baby. Continue to wear the splints as much as possible with baby care activities and at night. When holding baby during the day you can take the metal part of the support out. Seek help for baby bathing and changing nappies as much as possible to prevent excessive strain on the thumb tendon and avoid over stretching or straining your wrist.

If your symptoms continue beyond 6 weeks postnatally please speak to your GP for further advice and referral. In some cases, steroid injections may be indicated.



5. For more information:

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

<https://www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/rehabilitation-exercises/carpal-tunnel-syndrome>

Whittington Musculoskeletal Service

<https://www.whittington.nhs.uk/document.ashx?id=2610>

NHS choices

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

Patient.co.uk

<https://patient.info/bones-joints-muscles/carpal-tunnel-syndrome-leaflet>



Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

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Whittington Health NHS Trust
Magdala Avenue
London
N19 5NF
Phone: 020 7272 3070
www.whittington.nhs.uk

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