

Pregnancy Related Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

What is the carpal tunnel?

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passage in your wrist made up of small bones and a tough band of tissue. Several tendons and your 'median nerve' run through the tunnel to supply movement and sensation to your finger

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)?

CTS is a condition where the median nerve in the hand becomes compressed at the wrist. Symptoms of CTS occur when the median nerve becomes 'pinched' by pressure within the tunnel.

What causes Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Fluid retention in pregnancy increases the pressure in the carpal tunnel. Symptoms are made worse when the wrist is bent for long periods of time e.g., prolonged use of a computer keyboard.

If you had similar, milder symptoms prior to pregnancy there may be other causes for this. Please discuss this with your GP or physiotherapist.

What are the symptoms?

- Tingling or numbness in part of the hand (thumb, index, middle or ring fingers)
- Sharp pains that shoot from the hand/wrist up along the arm

- Burning sensations in the fingers
- Numbness of the hand while driving
- Morning stiffness or cramping of the hands
- Thumb weakness
- Frequently dropping objects
- Waking at night with hand pain and numbness

Symptoms tend to be worse at night or first thing in the morning. This is because we are unaware of what position our hands are in when we are asleep. As a result, they may be bent for a period of time causing pressure on the nerve.

You will be given a splint to wear at night to prevent you from bending your wrist and compressing the nerve.



What can I do to help improve the symptoms of CTS?

Remember PRIME

Positioning - Avoid positions where the wrists are bent for prolonged periods of time e.g. typing at a keyboard. When doing any activities with your hands such as typing try and keep your hands in a supported neutral position. Wear your splint particularly at night. Change the position of your hands regularly.

Rest – Minimise any activities that make your symptoms worse. Take regular work breaks if doing a manual task.

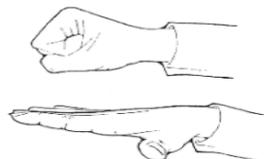
Ice – When your symptoms flare up, cooling your wrists can help relieve your symptoms. Run your wrists under the cold tap. Use a cold compress, such as an ice pack or ice wrapped in a towel. Do not apply ice directly to your skin as it can cause an ice burn.

Movement – Gentle exercises will help to control the symptoms. Shaking your hands when they are numb or tingling may help.

Elevation – Where possible, try to elevate your wrists/arms on pillows, to help reduce swelling. You may find this particularly helpful to do in the evenings before going to bed. Reducing salt intake prevents the body from retaining excess fluid.

Exercises for CTS

Range-of-motion exercise: Clench fist tightly for 5 seconds, then release, straightening your fingers all the way and keep them straight for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times for each hand.



Stretching exercise: Using one hand, bend the fingers of the other hand gently as far as you can, stretching the



fingers and wrist. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times for each hand.

Will my CTS improve after my baby is born?

CTS usually resolves after your baby is born. For some women it can happen immediately, for others it can take a few weeks. Bring your splints to the hospital as your symptoms may be a little worse in the first few days after your baby is born. This is due to extra retained fluid or swelling. Your symptoms should be gone completely by your 6 week check with your GP. If your symptoms are not completely gone by then discuss this with your GP.

If you have any queries regarding this Information Leaflet or would like to get a pair of wrist splints please contact:

Physiotherapy Department, Cork University Maternity Hospital – 021-4920567.

