



# PREGNANCY-RELATED CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

## What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)?

The carpal tunnel is a small passage in the wrist where nerves and tendons pass from your arm into your hand and fingers.

During pregnancy hormones cause you to retain fluid, they also soften the ligament that forms the roof of the tunnel. When this happens, the nerve running through the tunnel may become squashed which can cause symptoms like pins and needles, numbness and stiff painful hands. This diagram shows where in your hand you may feel symptoms.



## What you may feel

- Pins and needles.
- Numbness.
- Pain, may be worse at night.
- Weakness.
- Burning sensations in the fingers.
- Sharp darting pains from the wrist.
- Radiating pain into the arm and shoulder.

## What you can do to manage your symptoms

- Avoid any positions or activities that make your symptoms worse.
- Avoid heavy lifting.
- Avoid repetitive tasks.
- Elevate your hand(s).

- Sit on chairs with arm rests and elevate your affected hand on the arm rest.
- Avoid sleeping on the side of your most affected hand.
- Keep your wrist in a neutral (straight) position.
- Avoid positions of full flexion and extension.

### Neutral



### Flexion



### Extension



- Apply ice (wrapped in a tea-towel) over your wrist for 20-30 minutes every 2-3 hours. Do not put the ice directly on your skin.
- Run cold water over the wrist.
- Wear a compression bandage or Tubigrip™.
- Wear a wrist splint, especially at night, to keep your wrist neutral.
- Perform regular fluid drainage massage and gentle exercises described below.
- Reduce general swelling by:
  - eating less salty food -lying down to rest during the day
  - elevating your legs when sitting
  - wearing compression garments.
- Avoid smoking.

## Fluid drainage massage

Fluid drainage massage is a way to encourage fluid movement towards your heart.

With your affected hand elevated, gently stroke your hand/arm from the fingertips towards your shoulder.

**Never stroke towards your fingertips.**

## Tips for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

- Gentle exercise can provide a muscle pumping action to reduce swelling (e.g. make a fist, then spread your fingers, move your wrist forwards and backwards and bend and straighten your elbow).
- Keep your shoulder, elbow and hands moving normally to stop your arm becoming stiff.
- Don't leave your arm hanging down by your side for long periods.

## Breastfeeding positions for women with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Some women will continue to have symptoms after giving birth or may even develop them after giving birth.

Below are some positions to help avoid bending your wrist when breastfeeding your baby, the same principles can also be applied to bottle-feeding.

### When sitting

Make sure you sit up straight in a supportive chair and have a pillow underneath baby to support them. Once baby is attached to your breast support their head with your forearm (like in the picture) rather than with your hand.



### When lying down

Lie flat with your head supported. A pillow behind your back and between your legs can make lying on your side more comfortable. A small pillow or rolled up towel can be placed behind baby for support instead of using your hand.



**If pain persists or worsens contact:**

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