

Pregnancy related Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

The Royal Women's Hospital Fact Sheet / www.thewomens.org.au



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What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)?

CTS can cause pins and needles, numbness and stiff painful hands. It affects 30-50% of pregnant women.

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. CTS may occur during or after your pregnancy. 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 in the hand(s).
- 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(s) 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 10-15 minutes every couple of 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) straight.
- 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 gentle massage 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.

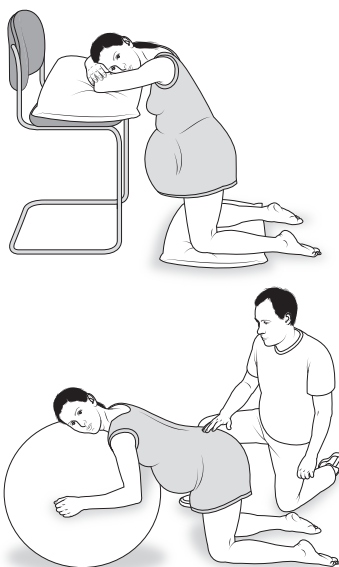
Tips for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

- 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.

Birth positions for women with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

If you are leaning forward on your arms during labour, lean on clenched fists (with straight wrists) or lean on your forearms (see diagrams)

Use the following positions to reduce your CTS symptoms. Notice that in all the pictures the woman has straight wrists.



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. This way your arms only need to support your baby rather than holding your baby up. Once baby is attached to your breast support your baby's 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:

Physiotherapy Department

Level 1, Royal Women's Hospital
Cnr Grattan St and Flemington Rd
Parkville Vic 3052
T 03 8345 3160