



# National Maternity Hospital

Vita Gloriosa Vita ~ Life Glorious Life

## Physiotherapy Department – Advice on managing Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

### What is the carpal tunnel?

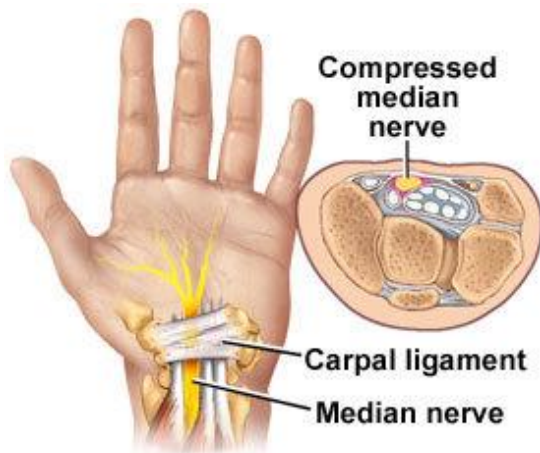
The carpal tunnel is the space at the base of the wrist, where nerves and tendons pass through from the forearm to the hand. It is a narrow passageway, formed by bones and a tough fibrous ligament.

The median nerve is one of the main nerves to pass through this space. It provides feeling to the thumb, index and middle finger, along with half of the ring finger, and gives power to small muscles near the thumb.



### Carpal tunnel syndrome

This is caused by compression or pressure on the median nerve due to swelling. Hormonal changes (especially in pregnancy), injury or repetitive actions at the wrist can cause carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms.



Women are more commonly affected than men.

Between 2-25% of pregnant women experience symptoms, especially in their second and third trimester.

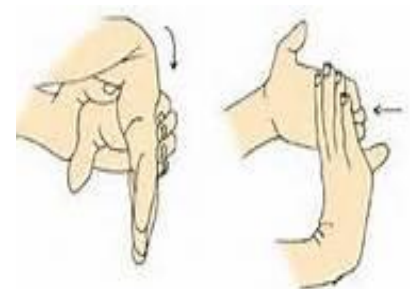
Carpal tunnel syndrome is more common among people with diabetes, thyroid disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, obesity and smokers.

## Symptoms

- *Pain* in the thumb and first three fingers, which may travel to the forearm.
- *Pins and needles* in the same fingers as above. This is usually the first symptom to develop, and may be experienced as a burning and itching sensation.
- *Numbness* in the fingers or palm of the hand.
- *Weakness/ Loss of dexterity* in the fingers and thumb, causing less gripping strength and feelings of clumsiness on picking up small objects.
- One hand (usually the dominant hand) or both hands may be affected, and the severity of the symptoms will vary.
- Often the symptoms are worse at night or first thing in the morning.
- **For the majority with pregnancy-related carpal tunnel syndrome, the symptoms improve a few weeks after they deliver.**

## Treatment

- Apply ice or a cold flannel to the wrist area 20 minutes before bed to reduce the swelling
- Drink plenty of fluid, preferably water, and reduce intake of caffeine, salt and nicotine
- Bring the hands into an elevated position at night
- Avoid repetitive actions at the wrists, fingers and thumb and cease activity that causes your symptoms
- Avoid any extreme bending at the wrists, try and keep them in the middle as much as possible
- Change positions regularly
- Improve your posture; if your shoulders are hunched forward it may exert more pressure on nerves running to your arms and hands
- Alternate between left and right side when expressing/feeding your baby and be mindful of your posture
- After doing a repetitive task, take a break and stretch your hands in the opposite direction
- Try not to grip or clench your hands; aim to introduce some relaxation time into your day to relieve built up tension
- Tubigrip support or wrist splints, especially at night time, but can be worn during the day if necessary



## Exercises to help manage symptoms

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLttO1pYTORo045TEVnYKYJADdQHjVijX>

## Medical management

If your symptoms do not settle, speak with your doctor about alternative treatments. Cortisone injections and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are also available, however the effects of these medications in pregnancy or when breastfeeding are unknown. Your doctor can advise you on the most appropriate course of treatment.