Carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy

Information for patients
Physiotherapy
What is carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common painful disorder of the wrist and hand during pregnancy. It can affect up to 60% of pregnant women. Symptoms can vary from person to person, from mild to severe. One or both hands may be affected.

Typically symptoms are usually worse at night and may wake you up.

What causes carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy?

There is 30-59% more fluid inside your body during pregnancy, carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy may occur when the median nerve in your wrist is compressed by this extra fluid.
Does anything else increase the risk of getting carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy?

Symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy may be increased by:

- Diabetes in pregnancy
- Obesity
- Repetitive wrist movements
- Keeping your hands down by your sides for a long time
- Putting weight through your hands e.g. on your hands and knees on the floor
- Injury to the wrist
- Rheumatoid arthritis

What are the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome?

The symptoms may include any of the following:

- Pain and discomfort in the palm of the hand, thumb and fingers.
- Swelling in the hand, thumb and fingers.
- Weakness of some muscles in the fingers and/or thumb can occur in some cases. This may cause poor grip.
- Loss of sensation (numbness) in the fingers and hand, which may cause poor awareness of hot and cold temperatures.
- Pins and needles, burning or tingling sensations in the hand, thumb and fingers.
- Stiffness and cramping in the hands first thing in the morning. Symptoms of carpal tunnel are usually less severe in pregnancy than when the cause of the symptoms is unknown.
What treatments are available for carpal tunnel syndrome?

There are a few things that you can do to try to lessen the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome while you are pregnant:

- Keep the wrists straight at night while you are in bed, and try not to lie on your hands.
- First thing in the morning, hold your hands in the air above your head and open and close your fingers a few times to reduce any overnight swelling. You can repeat this exercise a few times throughout the day.
- Place your hands under cold water for 30 seconds, and then in warm water for 30 seconds. Repeat this 10 times to improve the blood circulation in your hands. Be careful not to burn your hands if you have poor sensation in the hands and fingers.
- Ice wrapped in a damp towel and placed over your hand and fingers for 5-10 minutes may help. Repeat this 3-4 times a day. If you have poor sensation in your hands and fingers be careful that you do not get an ice burn.
- When you are sitting, place cushions under your arm and hands to keep your arms at the same level as your heart. This will help the blood circulation.
- Some women find a wrist splint helps to keep the wrist straight at night while you sleep. You can purchase these from the chemist.

How effective is the treatment?

You should be able to control your symptoms and prevent further pain and discomfort during your pregnancy.
Are there any risks?

- You need to take care when touching hot and cold objects to ensure that you do not burn yourself because of the possible poor sensation in your hands.
- Muscle weakness and loss of sensation in your hands may cause you to drop objects, so take care to grasp objects firmly before lifting them.
- There are no risks to your baby.

Are there any other ways to treat my condition?

Pain killers and corticosteroid injections may help. Please ask your midwife or GP before taking any medication.

Is there anything I should stop or avoid doing?

- Avoid repetitive twisting movements of the wrist.
- Avoid hanging your arms down by your side, carrying heavy objects.
- Avoid putting your weight on your hands for example, kneeling on the floor with your weight through your arms.
- You should stop doing any activity that causes the pain.

How will I know if the treatment is working?

Your symptoms should improve, allowing you to cope with everyday activities.
What will happen next?

Carpal tunnel syndrome usually recovers immediately after the delivery of your baby. In some women, the symptoms can last for over a year. Visit your doctor if you are concerned about your symptoms.

It is unlikely that carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy requires surgery.

Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

You can contact the physiotherapist if you have any concerns or questions:

- **0114 271 3090**

Where can I find more information?

The following websites will give useful information:

- [http://pogp.csp.org.uk](http://pogp.csp.org.uk)
- [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)