



**University Hospitals
Bristol and Weston**
NHS Foundation Trust

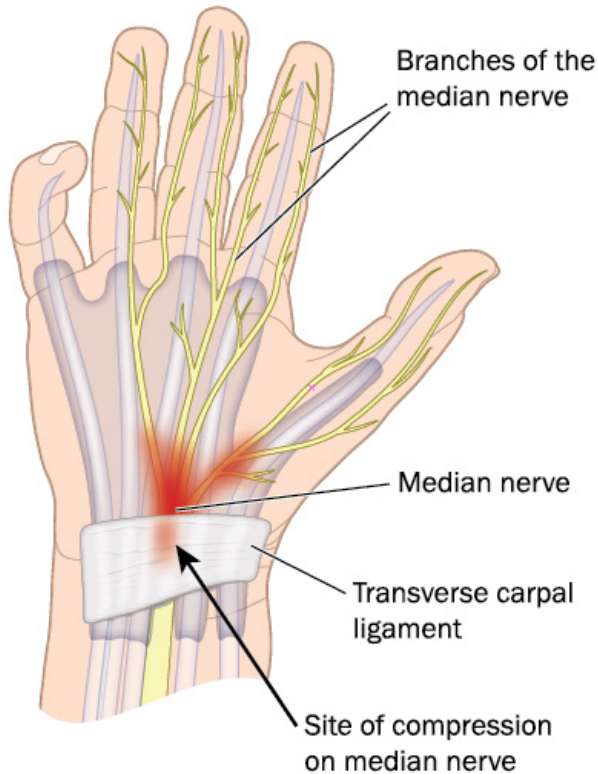
Patient information service
Bristol Royal Infirmary
Weston General Hospital

Carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy



What is the carpal tunnel?

The carpal tunnel is the name given to the bones and ligaments of the wrist which form to make a tunnel shape. The tendons and nerves supplying your hand run through this tunnel.



What is pregnancy related carpal tunnel syndrome?

Due to hormonal changes in pregnancy, the body is more likely to retain fluid.

If this extra fluid settles within the carpal tunnel, it can compress the median nerve, reducing its blood flow and stopping it from working effectively.

Weight gain during pregnancy can also contribute to further compression.

What are the common symptoms?

Common symptoms include

- numbness and/or tingling in the thumb, index finger and middle finger; although the whole hand may be affected
- swelling of the hand and wrist, however these may also occur separately
- difficulty performing simple tasks using the fingers, for example doing up buttons on clothes
- weakness and difficulty gripping objects, for example kettles and mugs
- increased pain at night and/or first thing in the morning.

What you can do to help yourself

Here are some ideas that you could try, see which work for you as everyone is different.

Sleeping and early morning

- Try to avoid sleeping on your affected side.
- Sleep with your arm(s) on pillows.
- You could try to hang your hand over the edge of your bed during the night to stop you from curling or lying on your hand as you sleep.
- If pain wakes you up at night, try hanging your arm out of bed and shaking your hand.
- Try wearing a wrist splint at night.
- Try some gentle exercises when you first wake up. Make a fist, stretch out your fingers, then circle your wrists in both directions.
- Try some gentle massage on your wrists and hands.
- If your grip is weakened or if you have a lot of pain, take great care especially first thing in the morning when picking up and holding hot drinks, or avoid doing this completely.

Wrist splints

- Wearing a resting splint at night may help as they keep your wrists in a good position and may help reduce your pain. You can wear the wrist splint without the metal bar if you find this is more comfortable.
- If you find your pain is brought on by repetitive tasks at work, you could try wearing wrist splints in the daytime. However, it is important to take them off from time to time and do some wrist exercises, as explained above, to prevent stiffness and/or muscle weakness.
- Do not drive if your grip is weakened. However if you need to wear your wrist splints to drive, you **must** inform your insurance company.

Exercises and massage

- Some people find benefit from sitting for a while with their elbows bent and their hands raised up as they find it helps move excess fluid. You could then massage in this position.
- Clasp one wrist with your other hand and massage it with a circular motion. This may ease congestion and encourage the movement of fluid.
- If beneficial, you could continue the massage, moving up towards your armpits, shoulders, neck and upper back. You may need assistance from a partner, friend, or massage professional to reach all areas.
- Try bathing your hands in a bowl of cold water for five to ten minutes to help reduce swelling and pain. Gently stretch your fingers and wrists afterwards.

- You could try an ice pack on your wrists but check you do not have reduced sensation first.
- Include some exercises and stretches at regular intervals during the day. However try not to do any movements that are painful as some stretches can make carpal tunnel syndrome worse.

Recovery

Most women experience improvement with the symptoms following childbirth. However, it can still take up to six weeks for full recovery.

If you are still experiencing problems after this period, please seek advice from your GP.

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit: www.uhbw.nhs.uk

Help us prevent the spread of infection in hospital. Please make sure your hands are clean. Wash and dry them thoroughly/use the gel provided. If you have been unwell in the last 48 hours please consider whether your visit is essential.

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **NHS Smokefree on 0300 123 1044.**

Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. **Drinkline on 0300 123 1110.**

For access all patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:
<http://foi.avon.nhs.uk/>

Bristol switchboard: 0117 923 0000

Weston switchboard: 01934 636 363

www.uhbw.nhs.uk

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For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



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