



# Carpal tunnel syndrome

## Where is it?

The carpal tunnel is the space between the carpal bones on the back of your hand and the ligament across the front of your wrist. The nerves, blood vessels and tendons which supply your fingers run through this narrow 'tunnel'.

## Why does it happen?

Extra fluid in the body during pregnancy (which you may notice as swelling), can put pressure on these nerves and tendons as they pass through the carpal tunnel.

## What are the symptoms?

Pain, numbness, tingling, pins and needles, heat, swelling, stiffness or weakness in your hands or fingers; any of these sensations characterise carpal tunnel syndrome.

## When does it happen?

Symptoms may occur at any stage of your pregnancy; but often later on and usually worse at night. It may persist for a little while after the baby is born, but should gradually disappear. Carpal tunnel can occur even when you are not pregnant.

## Seek help

Tell your midwife or doctor if you are suffering the above symptoms and they can refer you to physiotherapy.

The physiotherapist will assess you and decide on appropriate treatment. If pain remains after the birth of your baby, you may need to attend for physiotherapy outpatient sessions.

Symptoms should resolve within six weeks. You may need to enlist family or friends to help you with household chores: be careful when holding a cup or kettle of hot water if your hands are weak.

## PHYSIOTHERAPY SELF-HELP TIPS

- **Cold water** – to help ease the pain, run your wrists under the cold tap. Open and close your fingers.
- **Ice** – also good for easing pain and swelling, but only apply for 4 to 5 minutes and there must be oil and a

layer of damp towel between the ice and your skin (otherwise it could burn)

- **Ice** – bathe your hands in ice cold water for 4 – 5 minutes. Wear rubber gloves to protect your skin
- **Exercise** – open and close your fingers to reduce swelling
- **Elevation** - elevate your hands above your head when possible or rest with them on pillows also helps to reduce swelling
- **Rest** – try to reduce repetitive movements with your hands and wrists eg. typing; Wrist supports may help reduce the strain on the joints. Avoid heavy lifting
- **Compression** – the physiotherapist may fit you with support bandages to wear on your hands / forearms
- **Splints** – the physiotherapist may give you wrist splints to wear especially at night. These will keep your wrists slightly extended, thus keeping the pressure off the nerves
- **Massage** – ask someone to massage your hands, firmly stroking from your fingers to wrists to elbows; you may use oil for comfort, but not aromatherapy oils
- **Rings** – remove rings before they become too tight
- **Water** – make sure you drink at least one and a half litres of water every day.