Do you need further help?

If you have any concerns or would like to ask further questions then please do contact your women’s health physiotherapist for further advice and treatment. You can also contact the below number or your GP for advice regarding carpal tunnel syndrome not related to women’s health.

Our phone number
020 8487 6022
9.00 - 16.00

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Jo Fordyce - Clinical physiotherapy specialist in women’s health physiotherapist
Rebecca Bennett – Senior women’s health physiotherapist

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Living our values –
Excellent, Kind, Responsible, Respectful
What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) and what causes it?
The carpal tunnel is formed by the small bones in the wrist and a strong band of connective tissue covering these bones. Your blood vessels, nerves and muscle tendons travel through this tunnel.

This condition can arise during pregnancy when it is normal to have some fluid retention. Some of this fluid can collect in the carpal tunnel, putting pressure on the nerves that run through it. Up to 20% of pregnant women may experience symptoms of CTS.

Carpal tunnel syndrome can also occur due to overuse of the wrist, repetitive strain injuries and a number of other reasons your GP or physiotherapist will identify.

What are the symptoms?
The symptoms of CTS are variable, and can range from very mild to very painful. The symptoms can be in one or both hands. Some possible symptoms include:

- Pins and needles and/or numbness in the fingers, hands and wrists
- Pain or throbbing in the fingers, hands, wrists and into the forearm
- Problems with gripping objects and performing fine motor tasks such as doing up buttons

The symptoms are usually worse at night.

How long will the symptoms last?
This depends on what is causing the symptoms. In pregnancy symptoms will often persist for the duration of the pregnancy, but can improve with physiotherapy management. After having the baby, the symptoms tend to resolve within the first few weeks. However if you are having trouble caring for your new baby due to CTS, please contact your Women's Health Physiotherapist.

Sometimes the syndrome comes and goes and doesn’t need to be treated.

A person who has carpal tunnel syndrome caused by overuse during sports may recover quickly with treatment, rest and modified activity. In someone whose carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by arthritis, symptoms may be more stubborn and require longer therapy.

CTS doesn't always respond to physiotherapy and it is possible if your symptoms do not resolve and they continue to affect your daily activities, that you may require further follow-up with a specialist.
What can be done about CTS?
There are many things that can be done to manage the symptoms of CTS. These include -

REST - Over-using the hands can cause an increase in symptoms. Activities such as carrying heavy shopping, gripping and prolonged use of the hands can be especially painful. Try to reduce non-essential activities where possible and rest your hands and wrists on a pillow whenever you can.

ELEVATION - While you are resting your hands, try to elevate them above the level of your heart. This will help reduce the swelling.

ICE AND HEAT - If the symptoms are particularly bad, using alternating heat and cold can be helpful. You can use a basin of cold water and a basin of warm water, or some frozen peas wrapped in a tea-towel and a hot water bottle wrapped in a tea towel. Alternate between warm and cool for 1 minute each, for 5-6 minutes, always finishing with the warm water. You can do this 3-4 times a day.

PROTECTION - Your physiotherapist may have fitted you with wrist splints. These are to be worn primarily during the night and during aggravating activities. The splints should feel comfortable and firm but not tight.

MOVEMENT - Although rest is important for your wrists and hands, it is also important to move them in a controlled way. The series of exercises below may help to relieve your symptoms when you get them. Do this short sequence regularly throughout the day.

Helpful exercises

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

Step 5

Step 6

Step 7

Step 8

Step 9