

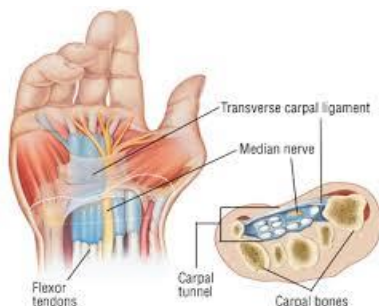
Physiotherapy advice for management of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a term used to describe pain, change in sensation, and sometimes weakness in the hand and arm as a result of increased pressure on the median nerve as it passes through your wrist.

What Causes Carpal Tunnel Syndrome?

The carpal tunnel is a small passage in the wrist where tendons and a nerve (the median nerve) passes through. Symptoms may arise when the passage is narrowed for some reason.



During pregnancy changing hormones cause ligaments to become softer and fluid to be retained in the body resulting in narrowing of the Carpal Tunnel. In 30-65% of pregnant women this narrowing will cause Carpal Tunnel Symptoms in one or both wrists during or after pregnancy.

Common Symptoms

The area of the hand most affected by symptoms are the thumb, index and middle fingers.

Symptoms include

- Pins and Needles, or tingling
- Numbness
- Pain
- Weakness in the hand
- Burning sensation

Symptoms are commonly worse at night or first thing in the morning.

What can I do to help?

Keep your wrists in neutral

Keep your hands in line with your forearm. This may mean modifying your sleep position, daily activities i.e. desk work, or baby handling once baby is born.

Avoid aggravating activities

i.e. activities that make the symptoms worse

Avoid gripping activities

e.g. gripping tightly onto your pram or hand weights

Keep your arms elevated when possible

Elevation above heart height with respect to gravity will help prevent fluid accumulating around the hands and wrists

Keep other arm muscles strong

Speak with your physiotherapist about safe strength exercises to keep the other muscles in your arms strong. You may need to modify exercises to accommodate comfortable grip and appropriate load.

Splinting

Use of a wrist splint is the most effective management of carpal tunnel symptoms, especially when implemented as early as possible. Splints can be bought off the shelf or fabricated by a hand therapist. If using a splint, we encourage you to mostly wear it overnight plus during the day during aggravating activities (except driving!). Speak with your physiotherapist about how to manage your baby handling with wrist splints in place.

Exercises

Complete the following exercises 3-5 times per day:

1) Gently move your wrist down and up as shown in the picture. Repeat 10-15 times

2) Open and close hand 10-15 times as shown in picture



Recovery

Management with the above strategies, including a splint, usually sees symptoms resolve within 4 weeks post-delivery. If they do not resolve, consult your GP or physiotherapist for further assessment and review. They may recommend you trial splinting for a longer period of time, and you can discuss other management such as a corticosteroid injection or surgery if symptoms are not resolving in the long term.