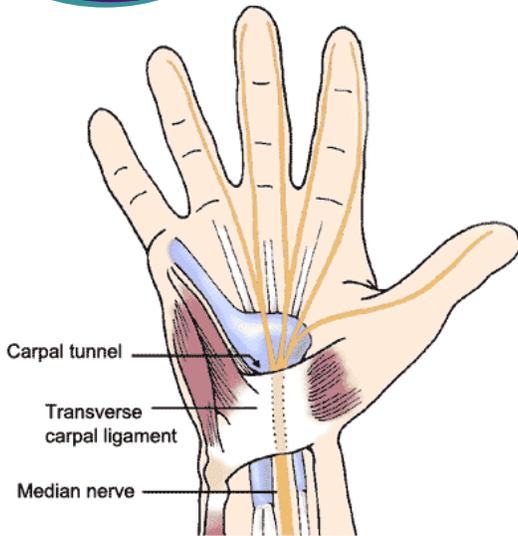


# Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in Pregnancy



Information provided/reprinted with permission of the University of Michigan Health System, November 2003

## What is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)?

Muscle tendons, blood vessels and a nerve pass through a bony arch formed by the bones in your wrist. This narrow bony arch is referred to as the carpal tunnel.

Mild swelling is common in pregnancy and this swelling often causes numbness and tingling of the hands and fingers from the pressure on the median nerve. This is called CTS.

## Signs and Symptoms

- ▶ tingling or numbness in your thumb and fingers
- ▶ weaker handgrip and difficulty using fingers
- ▶ swelling and increased warmth in your hand
- ▶ sharp pains or burning in your hand or going up the arm (this may happen at night and disturb your sleep)

- ▶ increase in your symptoms when moving your wrist

## Treatment

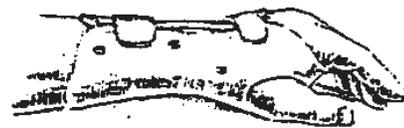
The goal is to relieve pain and prevent symptoms from getting worse during your pregnancy.

### Positioning:

- ▶ elevation (use pillows under each forearm and hand to keep your hand up when you sit or lie down)
- ▶ avoid putting your wrist in extreme positions of bend
- ▶ if you use a computer, place the keyboard so that your forearms are supported on the desk, place the mouse within easy reach; sit tall

### Wrist splints:

- ▶ the splint is usually worn at night but may also be worn during the day if necessary



### Changing your daily activities:

- ▶ take frequent breaks!! Overuse can increase your symptoms

### Ice:

- ▶ rest your arm (elevated) on a pillow, put ice wrapped in a cloth on the inside of your wrist for 15 minutes, 3-4 times a day (Do not put the ice directly on your skin)

*cont'd...*

## Hot and cold baths:

- ▶ alternate between warm and cold water baths (1 minute in warm and 15 seconds in cold); alternate between these two baths for 10 cycles ending with a cold soak
- ▶ make gentle fists and wiggle your fingers while your hand is in the water

## Massage:

- ▶ give yourself a massage or have someone else do it; stroke firmly from your fingers toward the elbow

## Gentle Exercises:

The following can be done to help improve circulation and decrease stiffness

Do 5-10 repetitions, 2-3 times daily within the limits of pain

- ▶ Make a gentle fist, hold for 3 seconds, then relax and stretch out your hand.

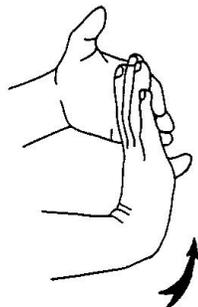


## Wrist stretches:

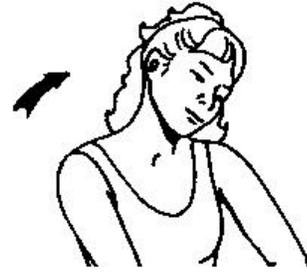
- ▶ Press palms together and lower hands downward. Keep palms together. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds for a gentle stretch.



- ▶ Keeping elbow straight, grasp involved hand and slowly bend wrist until a stretch is felt. Hold for 20 seconds.



## Neck stretch:



## What happens after you've had your baby?

- ▶ usually your symptoms slowly go away after you have had your baby
- ▶ protect your wrists as you care for your newborn
- ▶ when holding your baby, hold something in your hand (like a small rolled towel) to stop you from bending your wrist too much



- ▶ lift by bending elbows not wrists
- ▶ hold your baby close to you as you lift, to prevent the wrists from doing all the work
- ▶ put a pillow under your forearms when holding your baby on your lap

**For more information contact:**

**BC Women's Hospital  
Physiotherapy Department**

**604-875-2126**