



An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais
The National Maternity Hospital

Physiotherapy Department

Advice & Exercise for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome



What is the carpal tunnel?

The carpal tunnel is the space at the base of the wrist, where nerves and tendons pass through from the forearm to the hand.

It is a narrow passageway, formed by bones and a tough fibrous ligament.

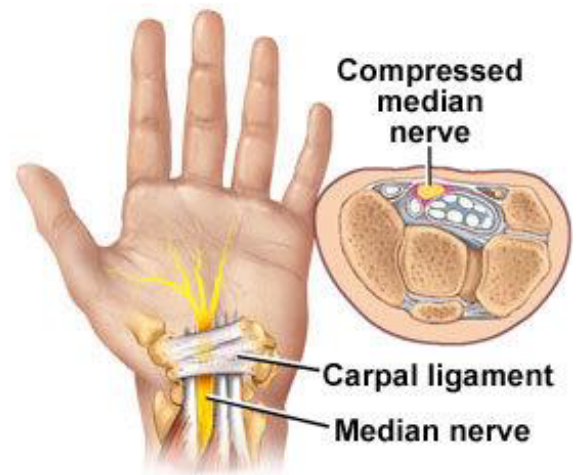
The median nerve is one of the main nerves to pass through this space. It provides feeling to the thumb, index and middle finger, along with half of the ring finger, and gives power to small muscles near the thumb.



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Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

- This is caused by compression or pressure on the median nerve due to swelling. Hormonal changes (especially in pregnancy), injury or repetitive actions at the wrist can cause carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms.
- Women are more commonly affected than men.
- Between 2-25% of pregnant women experience symptoms, especially in their second and third trimester.
- Carpal tunnel syndrome is more common among people with diabetes, thyroid disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, obesity and smokers.



Symptoms



- Pain in the thumb and first three fingers, which may travel to the forearm.
- Pins and needles in the same fingers as above. This is usually the first symptom to develop, and may be experienced as a burning and itching sensation.
- Numbness in the fingers or palm of the hand.
- Weakness/ loss of dexterity in the fingers and thumb, causing less gripping strength and feelings of clumsiness on picking up small objects.
- One hand (usually the dominant hand) or both hands may be affected, and the severity of the symptoms will vary.
- Often the symptoms are worse at night or first thing in the morning.

For the majority with pregnancy-related carpal tunnel syndrome, the symptoms improve a few weeks after they deliver. If your symptoms do not settle, speak with your doctor about alternative treatments.

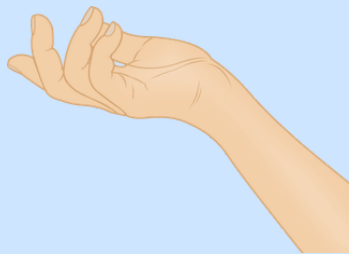
Treatment



Cold therapy and hydration

- Apply ice or a cold flannel to the wrist area 20 minutes before bed to reduce the swelling
- Drink plenty of fluid, preferably water, and reduce intake of caffeine, salt and nicotine
- Alternatively, you may find alternating between hot and cold helps. Alternate between a basin of cold water and a basin of warm water, or some frozen peas and a hot water bottle (wrapped in a tea towel) for one minute each, for five to six minutes. You can try these suggestions three to four times a day.

Positioning



- Avoid repetitive actions at the wrists, fingers and thumb and cease activity that causes your symptoms
- After doing a repetitive task, take a break and stretch your hands in the opposite direction
- Avoid any extreme bending at the wrists, try and keep them in the middle as much as possible
- Alternate between left and right side when expressing/feeding your baby and be mindful of your posture
- Try not to grip or clench your hands; aim to introduce some relaxation time into your day to relieve built up tension
- Bring the hands into an elevated position at night

Posture



- Improve your posture; if your shoulders are hunched forward it may exert more pressure on nerves running to your arms and hands
- Change positions regularly
- Make sure your work set up is posture friendly
- Regular exercise is recommended and can help improve posture

Wrist supports



- Tubi grip or wrist splints are designed to stabilise the wrist and prevent nerve compression, helping to alleviate symptoms like numbness and tingling.
- These splints should be worn at night, but can be worn during the day if necessary, to keep the wrist in a neutral position, which can help reduce symptoms during sleep.

Exercises

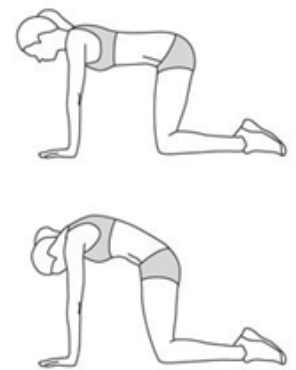
Arm Opening

- Lying on your side.
- Breathe in and reach the upper arm forward and up.
- Breathe out as you bring the arm back and over behind your back.
- Pause for a second, breathe in and bring the arm up and forward, breathing out as you return to the starting position
- Do not force it. Follow your hand with your eyes



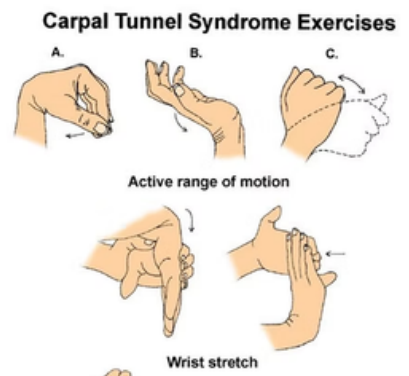
Cat/Cow Stretch

- Kneeling on all fours, hand under your shoulders and knees under your hips
- Inhale to prepare
- As you exhale engage your lower abdominal muscles and arch your back up towards the ceiling with your tailbone and head down. Try to stretch out any areas of the spine that are stiff
- Press your hands in to the floor and feel the stretch extend in to your upper back and shoulder blades
- Slowly return to start position



Wrist stretches

- Start with right arm out straight with finger tips pointing towards the ceiling. Use your left hand to apply over pressure to increase the stretch. Maintain a comfortable stretch for 20-30 secs and repeat on opposite side.
- To stretch in the opposite direction, right arm straight out with finger tips pointing towards the floor. Use your left hand to apply over pressure to increase the stretch. Maintain a comfortable stretch for 20-30 secs and repeat on opposite side.



Thread the needle

- Kneeling on all fours, hand under your shoulders and knees under your hips
- Take one hand off the floor and reach towards the ceiling. Bring your arm back down underneath the stable arm, threading through your body, allowing your back to twist.
- Slowly return to start position and repeat
- You should feel a stretch down your side, and your shoulders and neck.
- If it is too sore on your wrist, you can make a fist with your hand instead.



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