

Carpal tunnel syndrome in pregnancy (natural remedies)

Approved by the [BabyCentre Medical Advisory Board](#)

What causes hand pain and numbness in pregnancy?

If you have tingling, numb and painful hands during pregnancy, it may be caused by [carpal tunnel syndrome](#) (CTS).

CTS is common in pregnancy. It happens when there is a build-up of fluid in the tissues in your wrist. This swelling (edema) squeezes a nerve, called the median nerve, that runs down to your hand and fingers. This causes tingling, pain and numbness. You may also find your grip is weaker and it's harder to move your fingers.

It may be worse in the hand you use most often (your dominant hand) and in the first and middle fingers, though it may affect your whole hand. It may be particularly painful at night.

CTS usually happens in your [second trimester](#) or [third trimester](#). If you have CTS in one pregnancy, you're likely to have it in later pregnancies.

It usually disappears after your [baby's birth](#) when the swelling goes down. But for some mums, symptoms can last for up to a year after their baby is born.

You're more likely to develop CTS if a parent, brother or sister has it, and if you've had any previous injuries to your wrists.

How can I prevent the pain and numbness?

You may not be able to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome, but by reducing your swelling you'll probably be able to relieve the symptoms.

If you're overweight or you gain too much [weight in pregnancy](#) you're more likely to develop CTS. So try to eat a [balanced diet](#) to keep your weight gain healthy.

Aim to cut down on sugar and trans-fat, as well as (processed) salt (or processed foods), which makes you more likely to retain fluid. Drink plenty of water, and eat at least five portions of [fresh fruit and vegetables](#) a day.

Get fitted for a properly supportive [maternity bra](#). This will take the weight off your ribcage and breastbone, which may help to relieve pressure on the median nerve, which starts at your shoulder.

How can I ease the pain of CTS?

A wrist splint, worn at night while you sleep, helps to keep your wrists and hand straight and relieves the pressure in your carpal tunnel. You can buy wrists splints online or from your pharmacist. Or you could try hanging your affected arm over the side of your bed during the night to keep your wrist straight while you sleep.

If you use vibrating tools for work or hobbies, or play an instrument, stopping or cutting down these activities may help. Anything that causes you to frequently bend your wrist or grip hard with your hands, such as carrying heavy shopping bags or pushing loaded trolleys, can cause CTS symptoms to flare up too. So ask your partner or a friend to help you, if you can.

Alternating between heat and ice has been shown to help relieve the symptoms of CTS. Some women find it helps to put their hands in ice-cold water or place a bag of frozen peas against their wrist for daytime discomfort. Others find a warm water bottle helps, so give both a try to see which works best for you.

While there is no evidence that cabbage leaves help ease swelling, some women swear by them. There's no harm in giving this trick a go if you want to! Use green or white leaves which should be wiped clean but not washed, and can be cooled in the fridge. Wrap the leaves around your wrists to make a compress. Leave them until they become wet, then repeat with fresh leaves.

Exercises

You may find hand exercises ease the pain. There's some evidence they help so they're worth a try. Begin by clasping one wrist with your other hand and massage it with a circular movement. This may ease pressure on the nerve.

Gently stretch your hands and arms. Bear in mind that some movements can make CTS worse so stop if any stretches start to feel uncomfortable.

Massage

Ask your partner to gently massage your hands and wrists, moving up towards your armpits, and then your shoulders, neck and upper back. Again, while there's no evidence that this helps, it won't do you any harm to try. At the very least you'll get a soothing massage!

Which complementary therapies can help with CTS?

If you decide to consult a complementary therapist, choose one who's registered, qualified and experienced in treating pregnant women.

Acupuncture and acupressure

[Acupuncture](#) may help to ease the pain of carpal tunnel syndrome. Some studies suggest it reduces pain more than using splints at night.

Or you could try acupressure at home. You can try this yourself. If both of your hands are affected you may not be able to press firmly enough, so ask someone to do it for you.

Apply pressure at regular intervals to the inside of your wrist, at the point known as pericardium point six.

To find pericardium point six:

Measure up three finger-widths from the junction between your hand and wrist, moving in the direction of your elbow.

- Feel gently for a slight dip and press this point, which is where the buckle of a wrist watch might be.

Press firmly on the dip, which should feel slightly bruised, for 10 seconds.

- Repeat this three times, and do the same on your other wrist.

- **Aromatherapy**

If you enjoy using essential oils, try making a compress to soothe your aching wrists.

Cypress and lemon essential oils may help to reduce swelling. Add two drops of each essential oil to warm or cool water and soak a cloth in it. Wrap the soaked cloth several times around your wrists.

Not all essential oils are safe in pregnancy. Do not use juniper berry oil in pregnancy, even though it is often used to reduce swelling. It's not safe for pregnant women as it may affect your kidneys. Read more about which [essential oils are safe in pregnancy](#).

Osteopathy

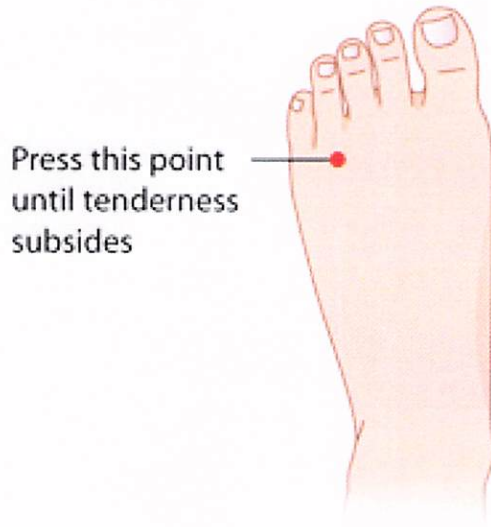
Osteopathy, and the related practice of **chiropractic**, aim to re-align your muscles, bones, joints and ligaments. Osteopathy can help to relieve neck and shoulder pain.

While there is limited evidence of whether they help with CTS, the treatments may help reduce pressure in your wrists, hands and fingers.

- **Reflexology**

Reflexology works on the principle that your foot represents a map of your body. There's no strong evidence that it's effective but it can be a pleasant and relaxing treatment.

You would have to pay for a session with a reflexologist. Alternatively, you could try a simple reflexology method yourself:



Try this technique:

Look at the upper surface of the foot on the same side as the hand affected by carpal tunnel syndrome.

- Imagine a vertical line coming down from the base of your fourth toe. Feel along this line for about 2cm (0.8in), until you find the most tender spot.
- Press the centre of this tender spot as firmly as you can bear it with your thumb. If you can't comfortably reach the point, ask someone to do it for you. Use constant pressure until the tenderness eases.
- Repeat this four or five times until the point you are pressing feels less tender.