

Carpal tunnel, wrist and thumb pain in Pregnancy

Wrist and thumb pain is really common in pregnancy. Common causes of wrist and thumb pain include conditions known as carpal tunnel syndrome and De Quervain's Tenosynovitis.

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel is a condition where you experience numbness, tingling and/or pain in your thumb, index and middle finger. It is caused by compression (squashing) of the nerve that runs through the wrist and into your hand.

During pregnancy your blood volume increases by 50 percent, which can make you retain additional fluid and irritate and compress the nerve, which most commonly occurs at the wrist.

Most women tend to experience discomfort overnight and in the morning as we tend to bend our wrists in our sleep, which further irritates the nerve.

What can you do for carpal tunnel syndrome?

Thankfully for most women, after birth the symptoms of carpal tunnel disappear.

During your pregnancy, I generally recommend that women use a wrist brace which has a rigid support that limits how far your wrist bends.

Cold packs applied to the wrist and forearm can be helpful to reduce fluid and nerve irritation.

Try to avoid excessive bending of the wrist and hand

Avoid repetitive tasks of the wrist and hand

Try and elevate your hands to reduce the swelling

Can Physiotherapy help?

Yes it can!

Sometimes carpal tunnel syndrome is made worse with neck and shoulder stiffness as well as excessively tight muscles in your forearm.

If your pain and symptoms persist contact your Pregnancy and Pelvic Health Physio for advice.



De Quervain's Tenosynovitis

This is a very painful condition of the wrist and thumb, caused by swelling and inflammation in the tendons which run along the thumb side of your wrist and they attach to your thumb. During pregnancy and the post-natal period, the increase in fluid and repetitive movements can make the condition worse.

Some of the common symptoms associated with this condition include:

- Swelling and tenderness at the wrist and base of thumb
- Pain which can be sharp, burning or an ache which can be worse with thumb movements and gripping
- Pain and aching overnight and early in the morning

What can you do for De Quervain's Tenosynovitis?

Trying to reduce the amount of lifting and carrying you are doing e.g. try a baby carrier, use a pillow for support for feeding, try using a trolley when you are doing your washing.

Use a brace and/or splint to rest the tendon

Can Physiotherapy help?

Yes it can!

Sometimes De Quervain's Tenosynovitis is made worse with neck and shoulder stiffness as well as excessively tight muscles in your forearm.

We can try a combination of various treatments such as massage, dry needling and taping to help the tendon heal and recover.

If your pain and symptoms persist contact your Pregnancy and Pelvic Health Physio for advice.