

Light at the End of the (Carpal) Tunnel

Do you feel like you've added an extra layer to your body? Maybe you've had your wedding ring cut off because it turned your finger purple? Fluid retention can cause another discomfort: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), and it has nothing to do with repetitive stress or overuse injuries.

Here's the scoop. There is one passage in the wrist (the carpal tunnel) through which nine tendons and the median nerve pass. According to Dr. Basil Besh, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, "pregnant women experience fluid shifts throughout their body." All those shifting fluids cause the tendons in the carpal tunnel (not to mention your feet, hands, and other joints) to swell. "When the tendons swell, it causes pressure on the median nerve in the carpal tunnel," Besh explains.

CTS causes a numb, tingling feeling in the fingertips and may be accompanied by pain or weakness. "It was excruciating," says Elissa Brachfeld, who developed CTS in her fourth month of pregnancy. "I was trying to work during my pregnancy, but I just couldn't type." Brachfeld received cortisone shots to help ease CTS pain. "As soon as it was done, my hand just went numb. It felt better immediately, and it was almost totally better four or five days later," she says.

CTS can be treated with physical therapy, wrist braces, anti-inflammatory medication, cortisone injections, and in extreme cases, carpal tunnel release surgery. "There's no need to suffer. We can alleviate the symptoms," says Besh. He recommends women speak with their care provider to determine the best treatment. The good news? Pregnancy-induced CTS usually disappears after delivery. "There's no strict timeline," says Besh, "but symptoms will usually dissipate after about two months."

— *Johannah Haney*

