



Netcare Waterfall
City Hospital



PREGNANCY-RELATED HAND CONDITIONS

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Pregnancy, especially the third trimester, leads to a myriad of changes in the hormone profile in expectant mothers. The effects of a shift in higher progesterone towards the end of pregnancy causes water retention leading to not only swollen ankles but swelling around the wrists as well. This can lead to compression symptoms in the median nerve, commonly known as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, as well as tendon swelling and impingement, commonly known as De Quervains Tenosynovitis. Early in the post-delivery period, these conditions tend to affect mums, causing discomfort and pain and interfering with carrying and feeding their bundle of joy.



CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition that causes pain, numbness and tingling in the hand and arm. The condition occurs when one of the major nerves to the hand (the median nerve) is squeezed or compressed as it travels through the wrist.

Risk factors:

- Heredity
- Repetitive hand use
- Hand and wrist position
- Pregnancy - hormonal changes during pregnancy can cause swelling
- Health conditions.

Symptoms:

- Numbness, tingling, burning, and pain, primarily in the thumb and index, middle, and ring fingers
- Occasional shock-like sensations that radiate to the thumb and index, middle, and ring fingers
- Pain or tingling that may travel up the forearm toward the shoulder
- Weakness and clumsiness in the hand - this may make it difficult to perform fine movements such as buttoning your clothes
- Dropping objects - due to weakness, numbness, or a loss of proprioception (awareness of where your hand is in space).

Non-surgical Treatment:

- Bracing or splinting
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Activity changes
- Nerve gliding exercises
- Steroid injections.

Surgical Treatment:

If non-surgical treatment does not relieve your symptoms after a period of 3 months, or muscle wasting (atrophy) occurs, we recommend surgery (after delivery).

DE QUERVAIN'S TENOSYNOVITIS

De Quervain's tenosynovitis is characterised by any swelling of the tendons and/or thickening of the sheath, which results in increased friction and pain with certain thumb and wrist movements.

De Quervain's tenosynovitis may be caused by over-use. It also is associated with pregnancy (by the action of picking up your baby) and rheumatoid disease. It is most common in middle-aged women. Regardless of the treatment, normal use of the hand usually can be resumed once comfort and strength have returned.

Symptoms:

- Pain may be felt over the thumb-side of the wrist. This is the main symptom. The pain may appear either gradually or suddenly. Pain is felt in the wrist and can travel up the forearm.
- The pain is usually worse when the hand and thumb are in use. This is especially true when forcefully grasping objects or twisting the wrist.
- Swelling may be seen over the thumb side of the wrist. This swelling may accompany a fluid-filled cyst in this region.
- A 'catching' or 'snapping' sensation may be felt when moving the thumb.
- Pain and swelling may make it difficult to move the thumb and wrist.



Non-surgical Treatment:

- Splints
- Anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs) - not safe in pregnancy
- Avoiding activities that cause pain and swelling
- Corticosteroids.

Surgical Treatment:

Surgery may be recommended if symptoms are severe or do not improve. The goal of surgery is to open the thumb compartment (covering) to make more room for the irritated tendons.



Dr Ashley Naidoo is a specialist hand and upper limb surgeon at Netcare Waterfall City Hospital and co-founder of The Gauteng Orthopaedic Institute. Tanya Coats is a specialised occupational hand therapist. Together, the Gauteng Orthopaedic Institute and Tanya Coats Occupational Therapy have collaborated to create a Specialised Hand and Upper Limb unit at Netcare Waterfall City Hospital.

