

## Aches & Pains of Pregnancy & Postpartum



**Includes:**

- **Round Ligament Pain**
- **Varicose Veins**
- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**
- **Neck & Shoulder Stretches**

## ROUND LIGAMENT PAIN


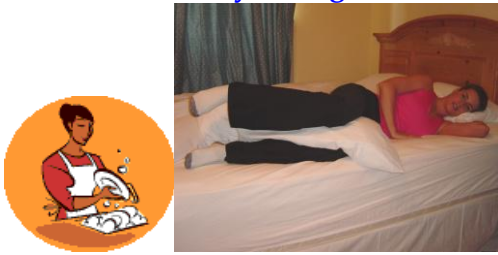

The round ligament is made up of two cords that attach or anchor the uterus to the genitals/pelvis. During pregnancy, this ligament thickens and becomes taut to support the weight of the uterus. Some times this causes discomfort.

Round ligament pain is sharp pain in the lower abdomen and feels like a stitch. You may have experienced a stitch in your side after running hard. The pain may occur suddenly with coughing or sneezing, or getting up from a chair quickly or changing positions quickly. Some patients say that brisk walking especially on tile or concrete or walking with hard soled shoes increases the discomfort. The discomfort may last for 20-30 minutes

### **Comfort measures:**

- Wear shoes with a crepe or rubber sole, gel inserts might help
- “brace” or hold your belly when you anticipate coughing or sneezing
- Make slow, controlled movements when you change positions, avoid getting up or moving suddenly or quickly.
- A support belt or maternity brace may help. Specifically, a Baby Hugger™ is designed to offer support to the uterus and may be helpful. Your therapist will help you locate these braces.
- If the pain persists, try to tilt your pelvis backwards (posterior pelvic tilt) in standing, sitting or laying and hold it for several seconds or you may place a small step in front of you and step up. This will also tilt the pelvis posteriorally.

## EXERCISES & COMFORT MEASURES FOR VARICOSE VEINS

<p><b>Causes of swelling</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hormones (progesterone) of pregnancy relax the blood vessels</li> <li>○ Increased blood volume/fluid overall</li> <li>○ Pressure of the growing uterus on the pelvic veins causing congestion in the pelvic area and legs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Symptoms</b></p>	<p>Aching, pain, tenderness, swelling in the legs, perineal area or painful hemorrhoids</p>
<p><b>Activities of Daily Living</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid standing for long periods of time. If your work requires you to stand, take a walk or march in place to move the legs. Example: washing dishes.</li> <li>○ Lie on your side when you read or watch TV. Sitting is less ideal for good circulation to the legs.</li> <li>○ Get off your feet to rest frequently</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sitting</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid sitting with your legs crossed</li> <li>○ Avoid positions that bend the hips and knees to extreme. Example: squatting or sitting on low stools or soft sofas</li> <li>○ Elevate your legs when you sit. At work you can turn your waste paper basket up side down and rest your feet on it. At home, lie down or prop your feet up on the coffee table.</li> <li>○ Pump your ankles strongly – up and down and in circles 15 times every hour.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Compression Stockings</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; background-color: #e0ffe0;"> <p>You may feel that wearing panty hose will make you feel hot but if the hose are effective in decreasing swelling in your legs, your legs may feel cooler!</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask your physician if you might benefit from prescription compression stockings. These are available in various degrees of compression ranging from 30, 40 or 60 mmHg (millimeters of mercury). Your physician will recommend the degree of compression that is suitable for you.</li> <li>○ Try compression panty hose.</li> </ul>

**TIP:**  
**Compression hose can be difficult to pull on. Try using a pair of rough rubber gloves such as you might use for household cleaning.**

**Back and Belly Supports**

A brace that “holds” you belly up such as a Baby Hugger™ may lessen some circulatory congestion in your pelvic area, decrease swelling and make you more comfortable

**Comfort Measures for Vulvar Varicosities**



- Apply a small wet and chilled towel to your perineal area for 15 minutes 3 or more times per day. A small baggie with ice chips wrapped in a wet washcloth is also an option.
- “Contrast baths”: Alternating heat and ice will also help to lessen swelling. Warmth can be applied by squirting warm water from a squirt bottle on to the perineum or applying warm compresses. Cold can be applied with cold towels or ice bags.
- “Pump” the fluid out of the perineum by lifting the muscles around your vagina up and in. Lift up and in for 2-3 seconds and relax for 2-3 seconds. Do 15 at a time.
- Wear a thick sanitary pad when you are sitting or driving. This will cushion your perineum. Also try sitting on a gel pad, cushion, pillow or egg crate foam
- Avoid constipation. Bearing down during a bowel movements increases swelling in the perineal area. Alter your diet to include more water, fiber, fruit and vegetables.

## EXERCISES TO IMPROVE CIRCULATION IN THE LEGS.

To lessen swelling in the legs, you need to “pump” from the feet towards the hips.

Position for Exercise:

- Lie down on your left side or elevate your legs.
- You may also do the exercises when you are standing for long periods of time.
- Hold on to a wall or furniture for balance if you are doing exercises in standing.

**Do the following exercises in order.**

**Foot and Ankle exercises: (lying down or standing at work for example)**

- Pump your ankles strongly up and down
- Make circles with your ankles
- Alphabet exercises: imagine you are holding a pen between your first and second toe, pretend you are writing the alphabet with the pen



**Knee exercises:**

- If you are lying in bed, push your knees down into the bed to tighten up the muscle on top of your thigh. Hold for 2 seconds, relax and repeat.
- Lie in bed with your hips and knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Squeeze a pillow between your thighs, hold for 2 seconds and repeat.
- If you are standing, march in place to exercise your knees.

**Hip exercises:**


- Squeeze your buttocks together as you are trying to hold a dollar bill between your buttocks. Hold for 2-5 seconds, relax and repeat.

**Pelvic Floor exercises (Kegel's):**

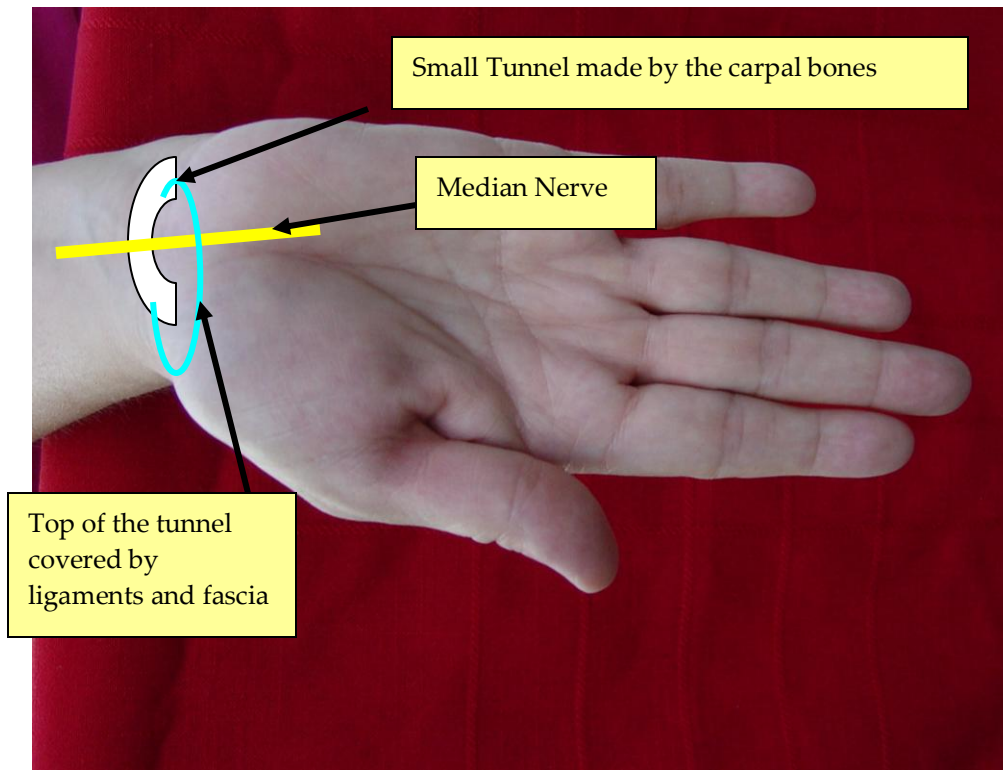
- Pump the pelvic floor by lifting the vaginal muscles up and in, hold for a 2-3 seconds, relax for 3 seconds and repeat 15 times.

**BUERGER ALLEN EXERCISES FOR VARICOSE VEINS**

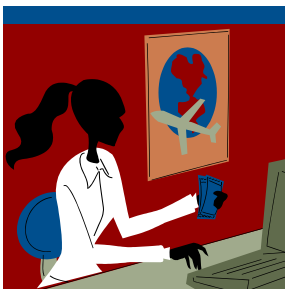
Do this exercise sequence twice a day.

<p><b>STEP ONE – 3 minutes or less</b></p> 	<p>Start by lying on your back with your feet elevated for 3 minutes OR until your legs are blanched (they seem paler than their usual color)</p> <p><i>Note: you may elevate your legs on the arm of a couch or on a coffee table or the head board on your bed or up against a wall</i></p>
<p><b>STEP TWO – 3 minutes or less</b></p>	<p>Now sit up and allow your legs to dangle over the side of the bed for 3 minutes OR until the color changes to red or purplish</p>
<p><b>STEP THREE – 3 minutes or less</b></p>	<p>Now lie down and pump your ankles for 3 minutes</p>
<p><b>TOTAL TIME IS 9 MINUTES (AT THE MOST)</b></p>	
<p><b>REPEAT THE ENTIRE CYCLE 3 TIMES.</b></p>	

## CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME IN PREGNANCY



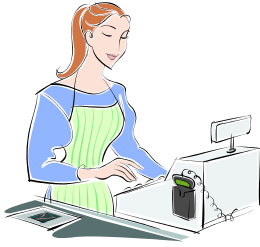
“Carpal bones” are the small bones of the wrist in which there is a small tunnel through which the median nerve travels. The top/open end of the tunnel is covered by tendons and ligaments.



Pressure in the tunnel, built up by swelling and/or repetitive movements, compresses the median nerve.

### Symptoms:

- Mild to severe pain in the hands, wrist and forearm
- Numbness in the thumb, index, middle and/or the ring finger
- Pain, numbness and/or tingling can be worse for some at night
- Wrist may feel stiff and swollen in the morning or at the end of a work day.



### Contributing Factors:

- Swelling or fluid retention due to the hormones of pregnancy
- Work that requires **repetitive movements** such as using a computer keyboard most of the day, cashiering, check out clerk at a grocery store, nursing. Hobbies such as sewing, quilting and embroidery may also increase discomfort.



**In all these lifestyle activities, the wrist is held in a slightly bent position for hours at a time. This causes the median nerve in the carpal tunnel to be compressed.**

- Swelling or fluid retention due to increased intake of salty foods or caffeine. Alternately, being dehydrated may cause the nerves to not function properly
- Swelling or fluid retention due to lack of activity (muscles pump fluid back to the heart by being actively used)
- Hunched over posture causing overall tightness in the neck, shoulder and chest muscles.

### Treatment:

- Minimize as many risk factors as you can. Drink more water, eat less salt.
- Move around frequently at work changing your position often. Especially move your wrists and hands as shown in the exercises that follow.

Change your hand and wrist position often. If you hold a baby in a cradle hold, change to a football hold or use both hands or let your forearm bear most of the weight for a while rather than your wrists.

- A brace may help to “rest” your wrist by holding the wrist in a mechanically correct position and may help to lessen swelling.
- Play the string game “cat’s cradle” – it provides a great work out for the wrist and fingers
- Use ice on your wrist: run cool water over your wrist or use a sac of loose pack frozen vegetables wrapped in a kitchen towel.
- When you are watching TV or talking on the phone, squeeze a soft foam ball or a large sponge. Hold your arms up over your head when you do this. The pumping action and the elevation of your arm will remove some of the excess fluid in your arm and lessen the pressure in the carpal tunnel



## HAND AND WRIST EXERCISES



Make circles with your wrist  
Open and close your fingers

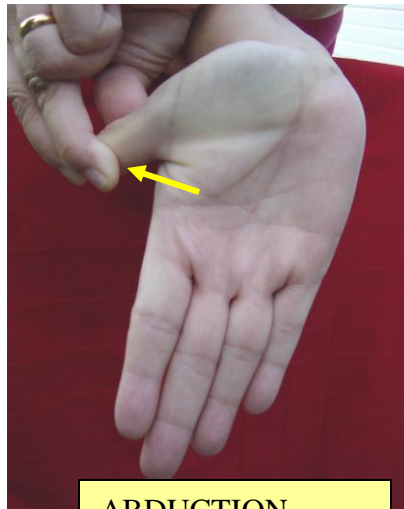


### **PURSE LIFT (2 lb)**

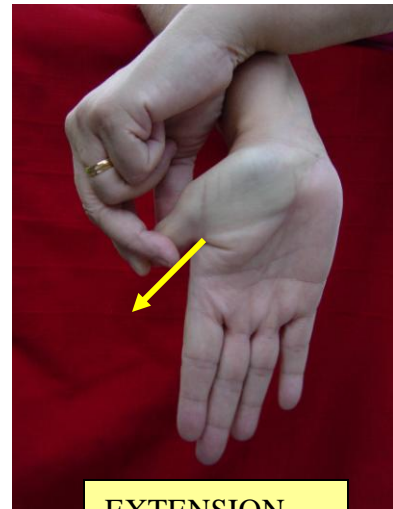
Rest your arm comfortably on a table or the arm of a chair so that your hand and wrist extend over the edge.

Hold your purse handles in your hand – palm facing the floor.

Lift and lower your purse X10.



**ABDUCTION**



**EXTENSION**

### **STRETCH YOUR THUMB**

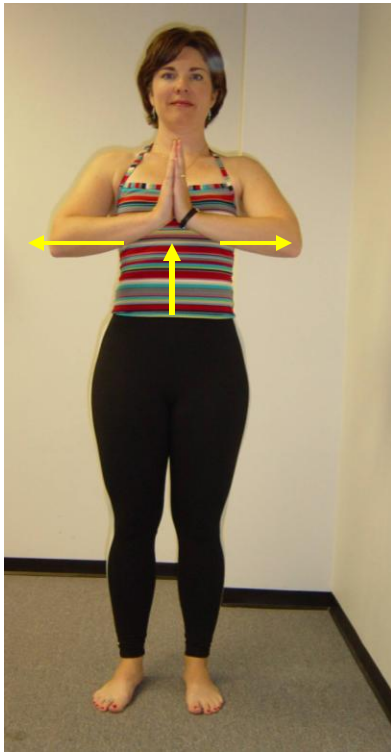
*There is a fascial connection of the tissue of the thumb and the top of the carpal tunnel. Stretching the thumb will stretch the roof of the carpal tunnel.*

Start with your palm facing forward, elbow tucked into your waist.

Hold the base of your thumb and pull it away from your palm and back towards your body (ABDUCTION). Hold the Stretch for 10 seconds

Hold the base of your thumb and pull it back and down towards the floor. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds. (EXTENSION)

*Reference:*



### **MOVING PRAYER POSITION:**

Start with your palms facing each other and move your elbows up (keep palm to palm contact) – till you feel a stretch at your wrists. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds. Now point your fingers down towards the floor, still keeping palm to palm contact. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

## SHOULDER AND NECK STRETCHES



### CHICKEN WINGS

Rest your hands behind your head.  
(don't push your head forward)  
Pinch your shoulder blades together,  
slightly raise your chest and pull your  
elbows back  
Inhale while you pull your shoulders  
back. Exhale when you relax



### SIDE BENDING THE NECK

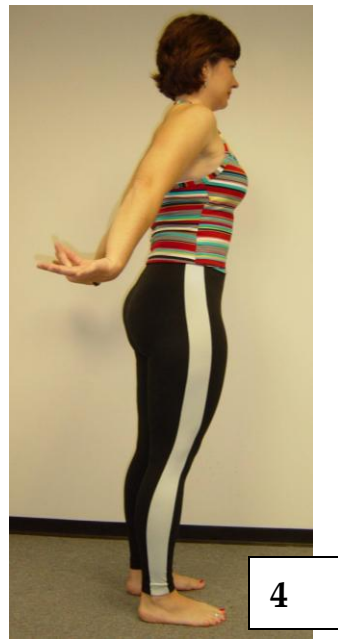
Sit or stand up straight. Shoulders  
pulled back, arms by your side.  
Bend your neck to bring your left ear  
to your left shoulder.  
Feel the stretch in right side of the neck  
Hold the stretch for 10 seconds.  
Repeat on the other side



### CORNER STRETCH

Face a corner and place your  
arms up on the side walls so  
that your elbows and shoulders  
are at 90°.  
Lean into the corner to stretch  
your chest wall and wrists

## MEDIAN NERVE STRETCH



HOLD EACH POSITION FOR 10 SECONDS – REPEAT 5-10 TIMES

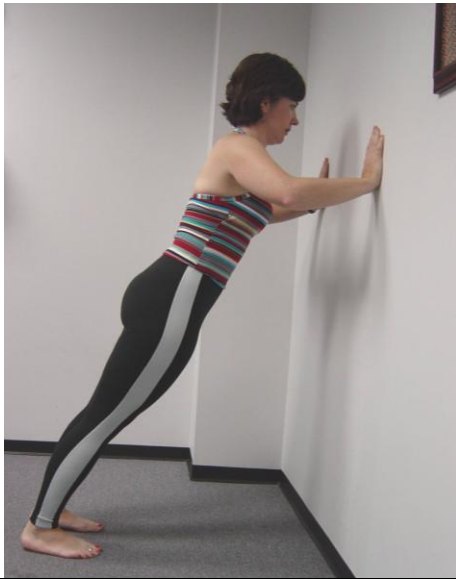
**Position 1:** Make a W with your arms, pinch your shoulder blades together

**Position 2:** Drop your wrists back into extension and feel the stretch at your wrist (and maybe your elbow)

**Position 3:** Holding your wrists extended, stretch your arms behind you

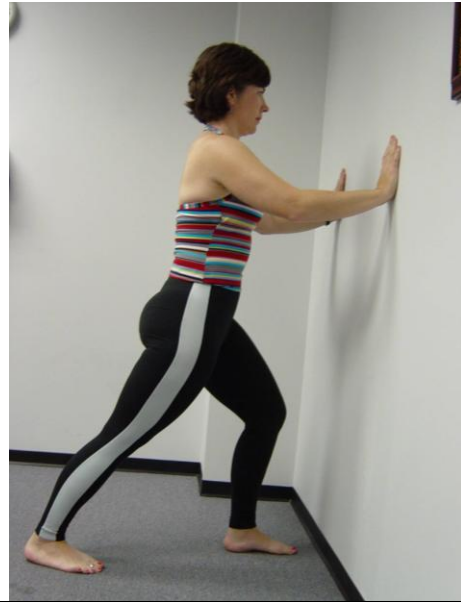
**Position 4:** Now make a circle with your thumb and index finger and bring your wrists into a flexed position.

## WALL STRETCHES



### Wall Push Ups I

Put your shoulder up against a wall, feet back and wrists extended. Lean forward to stretch your wrists. Hold for 7 seconds and repeat x10



### Wall Push Ups II

Place one leg behind the other, bend the knee of the leg in the front. Shoulders up against the wall, wrists extended. Lean forward to stretch your wrists. Hold for 7 seconds. Repeat x10



### NERVE STRETCH AGAINST THE WALL

Face forward and extend your wrist and shoulder back behind you.

Feel the stretch in the front of your chest and at your wrist.

Hold this position for 10 seconds.

You may “floss” the nerve by gently rocking forward and back.

## MUSCLE PUMPING EXERCISE FOR SWELLING



SHADOW BOXING to lessen swelling in the arms

To actively pump the muscles of the arm, pretend you are “boxing”. Start out with your hands close to your waist and make “boxing” movements X10.

Move your arms up higher so that your hands are facing the ceiling. Make boxing movements in this position x10

Move your arms up over your head and make another 10 boxing movements. Repeat the cycle X3

**The Guidelines in this booklet are meant to answer some of your questions and concerns. All the suggestions should be used under the supervision and advice of your physician and or physical therapist.**

**The author does not accept responsibility for the misuse of the Guidelines in this booklet.**

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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