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PELVIC GIRDLE PAIN DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy your body produces a hormone called relaxin which softens the ligaments in your back, pelvis and other joints, helping your baby to pass through your pelvis during birth. The softening of the ligaments combined with changes in your body puts a lot of stress on the joints, ligaments and muscles of your pelvis. This often results in pain.



Your sacro-iliac joints are joints at the back of your pelvis which are under more stress than usual during pregnancy. Overall, about 45% of all pregnant women and 25% of all women post pregnancy suffer from sacroiliac joint pain. The pain is often one-sided and may be concentrated in your buttocks. It may appear to jump from side to side or be accompanied by a general back pain or pain at the front of your pelvis. It can send shooting pains into your buttocks or down the back of your legs and even into your hips. One or both of your legs may feel weak.

Your pain may be made worse by lying on your back, turning over in bed, walking and standing up from a sitting position. It is often worse at night and the amount of night pain you feel will probably be related to how active you are during the day. Moving your legs apart, especially when sitting in a slumped position or lying down can be painful.

Pelvic girdle pain can begin as early as the first trimester and then remains fairly constant with the increasing size and weight of the fetus. Towards the end of the 2nd trimester and in the third the symptoms of sacroiliac joint pain can increase varying from mild, moderate, or even severe with accompanying degrees of pain and disability. A combination of postural changes, the growing baby, unstable pelvic joints under the influence of pregnancy hormones and changes in the centre of gravity can all add to the degree of pain and discomfort. In some cases it can come on suddenly following a fall or a sudden leg movement.

After delivery pelvic pain can take from 11 weeks, 6 months or in the worse case even up to 2 years to subside.

Ways to help reduce your pain:-

- You may be given a pelvic support belt. For about eight out of 10 women, these give immediate relief and can be worn safely during pregnancy. Maternity belts have been tested and proven to be safe for the growing foetus, with obstetricians recommending them for relief from low back and pelvic girdle pain.
- Strengthening exercises, especially for your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles improve the stability of your pelvis and back.
- When getting into bed sit on the edge keeping your knees close together, lie down on your side, lifting both legs at the same time. Reverse this to get up.
- Keep knees together when rolling over in bed.
- Sleep with a pillow between your legs; add more in other areas for support if needed.
- When getting into a car sit down first and then swing legs keeping them together.

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- Avoid sitting in sofas and chairs that are too low or too soft.
- Take smaller steps when walking.
- Avoid stairs when possible.
- Move within the limits of your pain.
- Avoid twisting, bending or squatting as this increases stress on the pelvic joint and therefore may increase your pain.

Pelvic support Belt

The design of pelvic support belts are based on medical research with the goal of improving the comfort of women during their pregnancy. Studies have shown that the application of a pelvic support belt significantly decreases mobility of the sacroiliac joints, reducing pain. A belt will support your sacro-iliac joints and assist your muscles and ligaments to keep control - reducing fatigue and pain.

How to wear the belt:

1. Wrap the belt across your lower back around to the front, wrapping low under the swell of your belly.
2. Overlap the ends in the front, under the abdomen/tummy.
3. Pull the straps snug, overlapping the Velcro ends to secure.
4. Tighten the strap and any additional straps as needed.
5. Adjust to fit comfortably.
6. Wear clothing over maternity belt



Some women will wear the pelvic support belt during the daytime hours, and others only use it on days when they will be standing or walking a lot. Exercise will feel more supported if a belt is worn, and may be the only time a woman feels she needs one.

Core Exercises during pregnancy

Strengthening the abdominal muscles may help prevent many problems such as sciatica, poor posture, weak abdominal muscles and lower back pain. Strong abdominal muscles can ease labour and delivery as well as helping with the physical activities of motherhood such as lifting.

During pregnancy the growing baby and hormones cause the stomach muscles to stretch in such a way that the abdominal muscles separate. This separation, referred to as diastases, allows the baby to come forward rather than push backwards on the spine- the normal condition of pregnancy. A problem occurs when the muscles over separate, leading to lower back discomfort, sciatica, weak abdominals, separation of the symphysis pubis and more.

The Transverse abdominis (TrA) muscle wraps around the torso from the front to back, similar to a corset. In order to engage your TrA you have to pull your belly button in toward your spine. Pulling your belly button toward your spine is NOT the same thing as sucking in your entire stomach. You want the chest to be still when you pull your TrA muscles toward your spine, and maintain normal breathing.

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1. Lie on your back with your knees bent up to 90°.
2. Draw your belly button in toward your spine, and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles (see below).
3. Hold for 10sec, making sure to maintain normal breathing.
4. Repeat 10 times per day.

Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor muscles soften and weaken to a degree during pregnancy, due to hormone changes, helping this area stretch for birth. However, when extra pressure is put onto the pelvic floor during pregnancy (when you cough, laugh or sneeze), urine may be passed involuntarily because of a more relaxed pelvic floor.

During labour and birth the pelvic floor muscles guide the baby through the vagina. This process can further weaken the pelvic floor. This is why pelvic floor exercises are important for all women throughout their lives, especially during and after pregnancy.

1. Squeeze and draw in the muscles around your back passage, vagina and front passage and lift up inside as if trying to stop passing wind and urine at the same time.
2. Try to hold the muscles strong and tight for 5 seconds. Now let them go and relax. You should have a distinct feeling of letting go.
3. Repeat the "Squeeze, Lift and Hold" movement and let go. It is best to rest in between each lift up of the muscles. If you can't hold for 5 seconds, just hold for as long as you can. If you can hold for 8 seconds, do so.
4. Try to do three sets of 10 squeezes, with a rest in between.
5. Do this whole training plan (three sets of 10 squeezes) each day while lying down, sitting or standing. Try to vary the positions you use so that your muscles get use to working in different situations.

What exercise is safe during and after pregnancy?

Walking, jogging, swimming, aqua classes, and cycling on an exercise bike are all safe forms of exercise during pregnancy. As long as you get the go-ahead from your midwife or doctor, you can engage in mild to moderate exercise up to three times a week. Stick to low-impact activities, keep workout sessions short and don't exercise to exhaustion. Remember, listen to your body and stop if you feel tired or feel that you've done too much.

If you were able to maintain your activity levels during pregnancy, you will find it far easier to return to normal levels of exercise after pregnancy. Most health care professionals err on the side of caution and suggest no heavy physical activity until your bleeding has stopped and you are no longer in pain, which for a woman who had an episiotomy, difficult delivery, or C-section can take up to six weeks. Remember, listen to your body, and when in doubt, consult your health care provider for the most accurate information for you.

A separation of the two parallel abdominal muscles (rectus abdominis) that run down the front of the abdomen on either side of the belly button is a normal occurrence in most pregnancy as it allows the abdomen to accommodate the growing baby. If you are suffering from separated muscles during pregnancy or in the postpartum period, it is important to take steps to encourage your muscles to reattach. It is unlikely that these muscles will reattach on their own. Simple abdominal exercises can help to bring the rectus abdominus back together. These abdominal

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exercises are designed to help target weak muscles and won't cause extra stress to your stomach or back. Before you begin any type of exercise, though, be sure to consult with your health care provider

At PHYSIO4ALL we run Back 2 Bizz classes which are managed by a trained physiotherapist with professional and clinical experience in woman's health. They are aimed specifically for people with a back problem, and/or who are pregnant, focusing on various areas, including improved core stability, and pelvic floor strength.

Sleeping on your back during pregnancy

If you typically sleep on your back, it is safe to continue doing so through the first trimester. But as the uterus gets heavier in the second and third trimester, it's best to choose another position, and many obstetricians will actively encourage this.

When you lie on your back, your uterus presses on the vein that returns blood from your lower body to your heart. Lying on your back for an extended period of time could interfere with the flow of blood and nutrients to the placenta and your developing baby. This is potentially unsafe, particularly if you have a condition like high blood pressure. Furthermore, lying on your back can cause problems with the soft tissues of your digestive tract, often leading to heartburn. It could also make it more difficult for you to breathe comfortably as the heavy abdomen presses against your diaphragm.

Don't be alarmed if you go to sleep on your side and wake up flat on your back. It happens all the time and shouldn't have any serious adverse effect on your baby's health.



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