

Back Pain During Pregnancy



Most women have back pain sometime during pregnancy. Back pain usually starts during the second half of pregnancy. Most of the time this back pain comes and goes, appearing for a few days or maybe a week, and then going away. Back pain that starts for the first time in pregnancy is usually mild. For a few women, it can be very painful. Sometimes, back pain can be a sign of labor or a serious complication like a kidney stone or infection.

Why do pregnant women have back pain?

Pregnancy hormones loosen all of your joints. Your growing abdomen (belly) changes your posture. These changes increase the normal curves that are in your spine, which can cause back pain as the muscles are stretched. Later in pregnancy these looser joints may cause your pelvis to move slightly when you change position. This can cause general pain in your lower back and sometimes shooting pain in your buttocks or upper legs.

What makes back pain worse?

Rolling over, changing positions, or getting out of bed; lying flat with your legs straight; and getting in or out of a car can cause back pain to appear. Sitting or standing for a long period of time can make back pain worse.

How can I avoid back pain?

- Avoid standing or sitting for long periods of time. If you stand or sit for work, change positions often. If you sit for work, put your feet up on a stool or box to tilt your hips forward and flatten the curve in your lower back.
- Avoid bending to the side or twisting.
- Keep your back straight and use your leg muscles instead of your back muscles to help lift something heavy.
- Try not to gain too much weight.

How can I make my back pain better?

- Do not put your body in positions that make your pain worse.
- Put moist heat or cold packs over the area that hurts. Sitting in a warm bath may help but be careful getting in and out of the tub.
- Have your back massaged.
- Wear an abdominal binder to lift your abdomen slightly, which will take some pressure off your lower back.
- Wear supportive shoes especially if you are standing or on your feet for long periods of time.
- Sleep on your side. You may want a pillow in your arms, between your knees, and/or behind your back.
- Do gentle exercise and stretch your lower back along with walking about 20 minutes most days. Exercise helps strengthen the back muscles and keeps the joints in good positions. The next page of this handout has some exercises to help back pain.
- If you stand or sit all day for your work, your health care provider can help you work with your employer so you can keep working but also use positions that help decrease the pain you are having.

My back pain is severe. Are there other therapies that can help?

If you have severe back pain that won't go away, talk with your health care provider to learn what treatments might be best for you. Physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic manipulation, or medications may be helpful.

What is sciatica?

Sciatica is pain caused by pressure on the sciatic nerve. This large nerve comes out of your spine low in your back and goes through your buttocks and down your legs. The main symptom of sciatica is pain that travels in a line down the buttock and back of your leg. This pain may go past your knee toward your foot. You may also feel tingling and numbness or have trouble moving or standing on your leg. Sciatica usually goes away in 1 to 2 weeks. The pelvic tilt exercises on the next page can help reposition your baby to take pressure off of the nerve. If you have severe sciatica, your health care provider may suggest chiropractic manipulation and/or physical therapy.



When should I call my health care provider?

- You are less than 37 weeks pregnant and have back pain that lasts for about a minute with tightening or cramping in your abdomen every 10 minutes or less even after you rest and drink water for an hour.
- You are 37 weeks pregnant or more and have back pain that progressively gets stronger and lasts for about a minute with tightening, cramping, or pain in your abdomen every 3 to 5 minutes for at least an hour.
- You have severe pain in your back that doesn't go away with heat, acetaminophen (Tylenol), exercise, or rest and keeps you from doing your normal life activities.
- You have very severe pain that comes on suddenly.
- You have back pain with a fever, nausea, or blood in your urine.

Exercises for Back Pain During Pregnancy

Pelvic tilt start position: note arch in lower back

Pelvic tilt end position: note absence of arch in lower back.



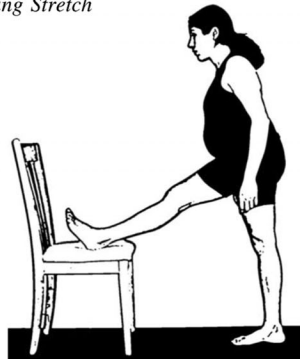
Kneel on your hands and knees, you'll notice an arch in your lower back. Tilt your pelvis backwards, so you flatten your back, keeping your buttocks relaxed.

Back stretch

Hamstring Stretch



Kneel on your hands and knees, with your legs spread apart, and a small pillow under your belly. Sit back and reach your arms forward to feel a stretch along your spine.



Face a chair and place one foot on it. Keep your back straight as you gently lean forward to stretch the back of the thigh.

Adapted with permission from: Silva A. Expect Fitness (www.expectfitness.com)

For More Information

Babycenter

http://www.babycenter.com/0_low-back-pain-during-pregnancy_9402.bc?showAll=true

PregnancyCorner

<http://www.pregnancycorner.com/being-pregnant/pregnancy-pains/back.html>

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