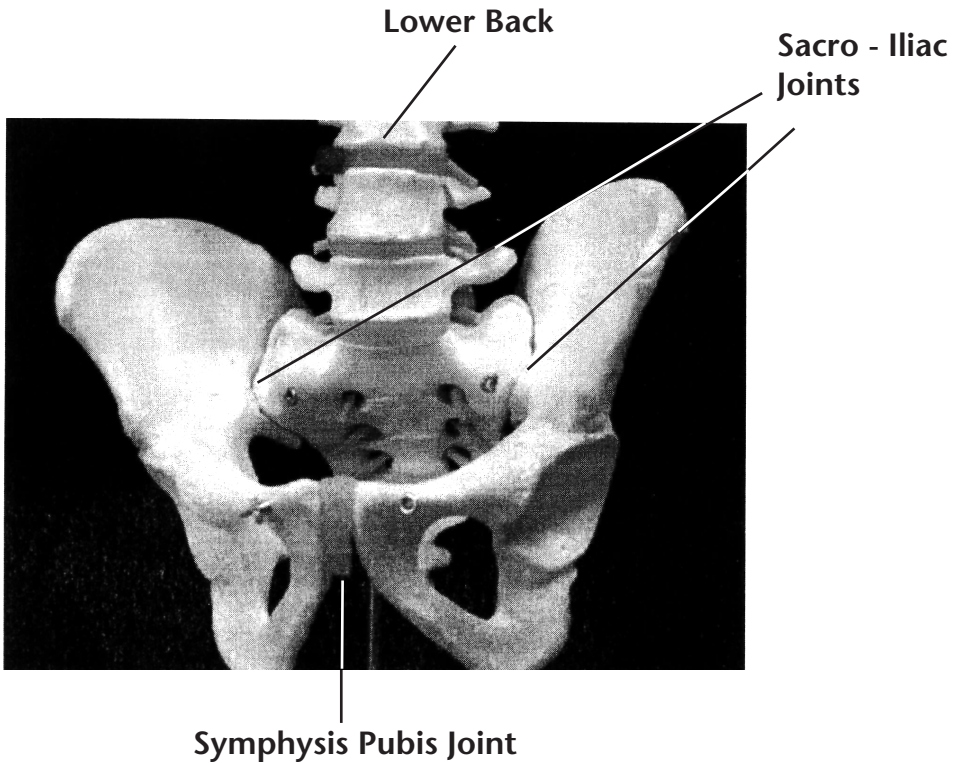


How to manage **Back Pain during Pregnancy**



Back Pain

The pelvis is made up of three large bones, and the lower back is made up of five bones called vertebrae, as shown on the diagram below. The joints of the pelvis and lower back are held together by thick ligaments which support the joints and give them strength.



Why am I getting back pain during pregnancy?

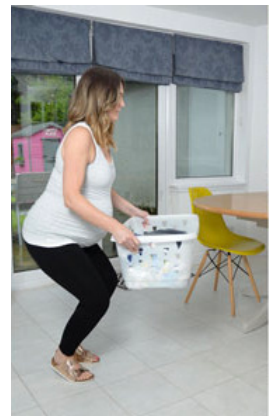
It is very common to get back pain during pregnancy and this can occur at any stage. Back pain can be due to the weight of your growing baby altering your posture and spinal curves, with the ligaments in your back and pelvis naturally softening to prepare your body for delivery. Pregnancy related fatigue and weight gain can also lead to extra strain on your back.

Signs and Symptoms

- Pain or pressure particularly in the lower back and or pelvis.
- Pain in the lower back, buttocks, thighs, and further into the leg.
- Pain can be on one or both sides, and can be mild to severe in nature.
- A “waddling” walking pattern is common.
- A clicking or grinding sensation may be felt.

What can I do to ease the symptoms?

- Rest whenever possible.
- Only do essential lifting and try to avoid heavy lifting. This will help to reduce the strain on your back and pelvis. When lifting, bend at the hips and knees. Sit on a chair whenever possible to do these types of activities, for example loading or unloading a washing machine.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and abdominal muscles before you begin to perform any activity you think might cause you pain.
- Sit to perform activities you would normally do standing, such as putting underwear or socks on, drying yourself when coming out of the shower etc. Avoid activities which involve standing on one leg or twisting your back.



- If you have difficulty or pain when bathing, if possible, try using a shower instead.
- Use an escalator or lift instead of the stairs where possible.
- Applying heat at regular intervals to the painful area can also help to ease your symptoms. Use a hot water bottle covered with a towel.
- Sitting on a gym ball may help to relieve your symptoms. You may find 'pelvic tilting' or rocking your hips while sitting on the ball also helps.



Comfortable Positions

Side lying with your knees bent and a pillow between them. This improves your posture and helps to prevent your back twisting. You may find placing a pillow under your tummy to support your pregnancy “bump”, or to support your waist in side-lying may also make you feel more supported.



Sitting with your back supported and feet on a small stool. A high firm chair is better. Placing a rolled up towel or lumbar roll at your lower back improves your posture and can make you more comfortable.



Bad Position



Good Position

Standing tall can improve your posture and make you feel more comfortable.



Bad Position



Good Position

How to get in and out of bed

First tighten your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles, bend your knees as close to your tummy as possible and roll onto your side.

Then, push yourself up into a sitting position with your arms, slip both your legs over the edge of the bed, knees together and you are ready to stand up. To get into bed do this in reverse.

When turning in bed, bend your knees close to your tummy, clench your buttock muscles, and use your arms. You can also turn in bed by going onto all fours when moving from side to side.



Exercise and Activity Advice

It is important to try and be as active as you can through your pregnancy. Mild to moderate exercise is good for you and your developing baby, and most healthy women will find moderate exercise beneficial during their pregnancy.

Every woman will have a different fitness level before they become pregnant, and if you are used to exercising you can continue with your normal routine if you are fit and well. If any activity increases your pain, reduce the duration and level of that activity, or try and find an activity that does not flare up your symptoms. For example if walking for 30 minutes flares your pain try 15-20 minutes of walking. This is called pacing. This may allow you to be active and control your symptoms. As your pregnancy progresses, it is natural to slow down.

If you attend any classes speak to the instructor about your back pain and they may be able to modify specific exercises for you.

If you are worse after classes look into other exercise options.

Swimming can be a good form of exercise. If you have pain at your back try changing your swimming stroke.

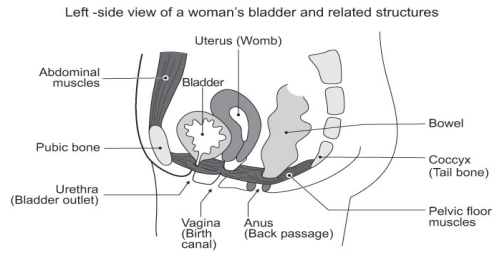
Gentle Exercises

These are gentle and basic exercises that are safe to do in your pregnancy. Your physiotherapist may have discussed these with you at your appointment. You should aim do these exercises 3-4 times per day.

1. Pelvic Floor exercises
2. Deep abdominal exercises
3. Pelvic tilt

1. Pelvic Floor Exercise

Lie, sit or stand with your knees slightly apart. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. The feeling is one of “squeeze and lift”, closing and drawing up at the back and front passages. This is called a pelvic floor contraction.



Do not:

- Hold your breath
- Squeeze your legs together
- Tighten buttock muscles

First, find your ‘starting block’

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as previously described and hold for as many seconds as you can (maximum of 10 seconds)

How many seconds can you hold this contraction? _____

Release the contraction and rest for four seconds, then repeat as many times as you can (maximum of 10).

How many times can you repeat this? _____

Now perform the basic pelvic floor exercise but squeeze and lift quickly and immediately let go. This is called a fast contraction and will help your muscles react quickly when you laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise or lift.

How many quick contractions can you do? _____

(maximum of 10)

This becomes your ‘starting block’. Repeat your ‘starting block’ four to six times each day.

Try the NHS Squeazy APP for women

It is helpful in reminding you to do your pelvic floor exercises.

2. Deep abdominal exercise

1. Lie on your side with your knees bent.
2. Place your hand on your lower abdomen between your tummy button and your pubic bone – breathe normally and let your tummy sag.
3. Breathe in gently to prepare. As you breathe out draw in the lower part of your tummy towards your back, then relax.
4. Repeat but keep your muscles drawn in while you continue to breathe. Aim to hold for a count of 6 seconds. Repeat as many times as you can.

Progress

- Gradually increase the length of time holding in, and the number of repetitions (10 seconds, 10 times).
- Hold your lower tummy in when walking, standing and lifting.

3. Pelvic tilt

Once you can manage the deep abdominal exercise, you can move on to this exercise.

1. On your hands and knees on top of your bed.
2. Draw in your deep abdominal muscles as in the previous exercise.



3. Keep pulling in your deep abdominal muscles, tilting your pubic bone towards your chest and flattening the small of your back. Hold for 6 seconds then slowly release. Keep breathing normally throughout.

Note

- Try other positions; sitting, standing or lying on side.
- Gradually increase the number of repetitions (10 times).

If your Physiotherapist has performed a mobilisation on your pelvis or back during a treatment session, you may feel increased or continued symptoms for a few days afterwards. If your symptoms do not settle after this, please contact your physiotherapist for advice.

Labour and delivery

When you come into hospital tell the staff that you have or have had back pain and that you have attended physiotherapy. If your problem has been severe or is unresolved, the physiotherapist may have discussed labour and delivery with you and or recorded advice for your care during labour in your electronic notes.

If you have been issued with crutches and no longer need to use them, please return them to the department.

After the birth of your baby

Back pain may take some time to settle after the birth of your baby. After delivery ask to see the physiotherapist while you are in the post-natal ward. You should continue to follow the advice after your baby is born (the post natal period). Do not hesitate to call the physiotherapy department for advice (within six weeks) if you have any concerns when you go home from hospital.

This leaflet is produced by the Physiotherapy Department. If your symptoms get worse or you need further advice please telephone the department from Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am and 4pm.

Further Information

If you have any questions please contact the Physiotherapy Department.

Inverclyde Royal Hospital:**01475 504 373**

Princess Royal Maternity:**0141 211 5232**

Queen Elizabeth University Hospital:**0141 201 2324**

Royal Alexandra Hospital:**0141 314 6765**

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This booklet has been produced by the NHS GG&C Obstetric Physiotherapy Teams.