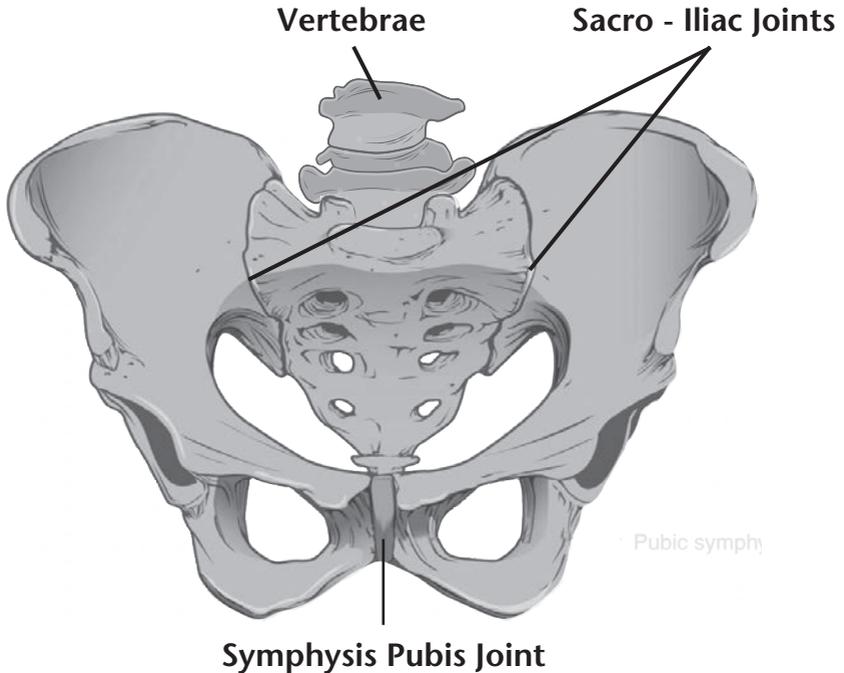


How to manage Back Pain during Pregnancy



Back Pain

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



Why am I getting back pain during pregnancy?

Back pain is very common in pregnancy and can occur at any stage. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including:

- Postural changes due to the growing baby putting strain on the joints and muscles of the low back and pelvis.
- Uneven movement within the joints of the low back and pelvis.
- Changes to the muscles around the low back and pelvis
- For a few women, pain can be due to hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy

Signs and Symptoms

- Pain in the low 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.

What can I do to ease the symptoms?

- Try to avoid heavy lifting. When lifting is required, bend at your hips and knees and keep the object close to your body.
- 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. If painful, avoid activities which involve standing on one leg or twisting your back.



- 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 and apply to the painful area for 15-20 minutes, as required throughout the day.
- Sitting on a gym ball may help to relieve your symptoms. You may find ‘pelvic tilting’ (see p9) 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 allows your back to be in a more neutral position. 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 comfortable.



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



Good Position

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



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

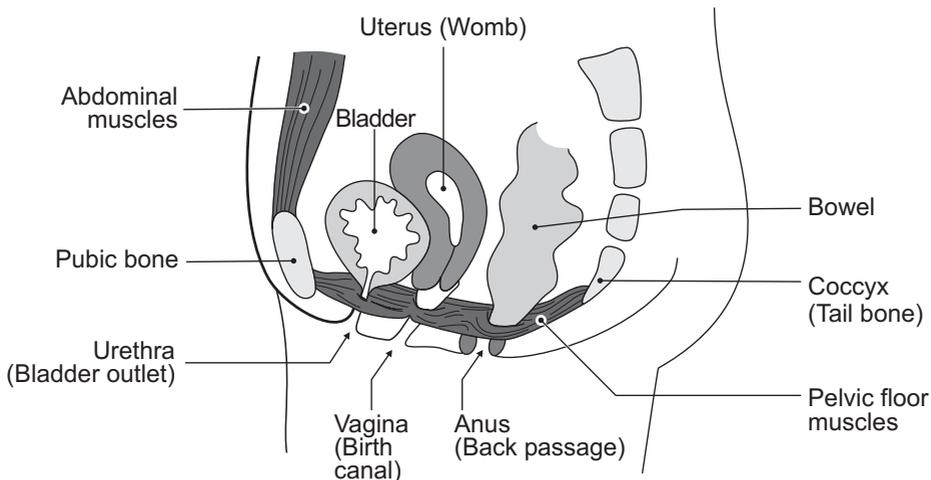
These are gentle and basic exercises that are safe to do in your pregnancy. You should aim do these exercises 3-4 times per day.

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.

Left -side view of a woman's bladder and related structures



Do not:

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

Carry out 10 quick contractions: squeezing and releasing the muscle immediately.

Carry out 10 slow contractions: squeezing and holding the contraction for up to 10 seconds.

Complete both the quick and slow contractions 10 times.

Try the NHS Squeezy APP for women

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

2. Deep abdominal exercise

1. You can do this exercise sitting up in a chair or lying on your side.
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).

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).

After the birth of your baby

Most pregnancy-related back pain will improve after the birth of your baby, although this can take a few months. Continue to follow the advice in this leaflet after your baby is born and whilst your back pain is settling. Do not hesitate to call the physiotherapy department for advice (within six weeks) if you have any concerns when you go home from hospital.

Worsening Symptoms

In some very rare cases low back pain requires immediate attention. This condition is called Cauda Equina Syndrome.

Some of the warning signs to look out for include:

- Loss of feeling and, or, pins and needles between your inner thighs or around your genitals
- Altered sensation and, or, pain constantly in both legs at the same time
- Numbness in or around your back passage
- Changes to bladder or bowel function, such as loss of sensation, loss of control or an inability to empty your bladder or bowels

If you experience any of the above, please go to your nearest Accident and Emergency Department for a medical assessment.

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

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 201 3432
- Queen Elizabeth University Hospital: ☎ 0141 201 2324
- Royal Alexandra Hospital: ☎ 0141 314 6765
- Vale of Leven: ☎ 01389 817 531

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several overlapping, wavy, horizontal bands in shades of gray and white, creating a sense of movement and depth.

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

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