

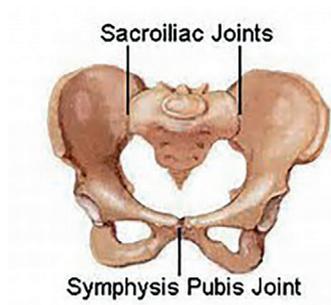


South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust

Advice and exercises for pelvic and low back pain in pregnancy

Some women can experience back and/or pelvic pain during pregnancy.

Your pelvis forms a ring with one joint at the front and two joints at the back. Any or all of these joints can be affected during pregnancy.



Your back is also under more strain than usual during pregnancy:

- Pregnancy hormones allow ligaments to become more lax therefore joints have less support than usual
- As your bump increases in size your centre of gravity changes putting extra strain on your back and pelvis
- Your tummy muscles, which support your spine and pelvis, become stretched and weakened.

For these reasons it is important to listen to your body, pace yourself as pregnancy progresses and pay particular attention to your posture.

Posture

In standing:



- Contract abdominal muscles gently
- Tuck tailbone under and lengthen through your spine
- Ears, shoulders and hips should all be in line.

In sitting :



- Avoid slouching
- Sit into the chair so that the chair supports the length of your thigh
- A rolled up towel or small cushion in the small of your back helps provide support
- Sit so your knees are level with your hips
- Avoid crossing your legs as this position decreases circulation.

Activities of daily living



- Keep body symmetrical when you move
- Carry shopping equally in each hand
- Avoid twisting eg. carrying babies on your hip
- Avoid heavy lifting - if you need to, bend your knees and keep items close
- Use the shower rather than the bath
- If bathing, sit on the edge and gently lift legs in
- When getting into a car, keep knees together. Sit down first and then swing legs in together
- This can be made easier by putting a plastic bag on the seat. Just remember to put it behind you for driving
- Plan the day so that you have as few trips up and down stairs as possible
- Go up leading with your good leg and down stairs leading with the sorer side
- Avoid sitting/standing in one position for too long - short breaks will help keep joints and tissues mobile
- Heat - you may find that a hot water bottle or heat pack are soothing to achy areas and can be particularly useful if you have areas of muscle tightness.
- A cold pack can be useful for pain at the front of your pelvis - use for 5-10mins to reduce inflammation
- Sleep with a pillow under your bump and between your knees to keep good alignment
- If you are experiencing discomfort in your hips it may help to place a spare duvet under your bed sheet to provide extra cushioning and relieve pressure.

For further advice:

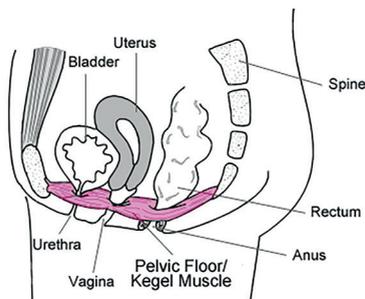
- Pelvic Partnership - www.pelvicpartnership.org.uk
- Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological physiotherapists (POGP) - www.pogp.csp.org.uk.

Antenatal exercises

The following exercises are designed to help you reduce the strain on your body and make you more comfortable during your pregnancy.

Remember to always listen to your body and stop if you are experiencing any discomfort.

1. Pelvic floor exercises



Pelvic floor muscles stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone in front to the tailbone at the back. They support all the organs of the pelvis and during pregnancy they are under extra strain to support your growing uterus, baby and amniotic fluid which can weaken these muscles.

Strong pelvic floor muscles are essential to prevent leakage of urine when you laugh, cough or sneeze, for enjoyable sexual intercourse and to give you complete control of your bowels therefore it is important to get into a good habit of exercising them - it's never too late to start!

Pelvic floor contraction

This exercise can be done lying, sitting or standing. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind, and at the same time trying to stop the flow of urine. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the passages between your legs.

Long contraction

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as previously described and hold for as many seconds as you can (up to 10 seconds) Let the muscles completely release and rest for several seconds. Repeat this long contraction as many times as you can (up to 10 times).

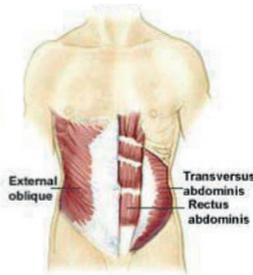
Short contraction

Now squeeze and lift more firmly and then release completely straight away. Repeat this as many times in a row as you can (up to 10). Practice these exercises at least 3 times daily.

Be careful not to hold your breath, tighten your leg muscles, tummy muscles or buttocks while doing these exercises.

Knack - to perform this technique, tighten your pelvic floor muscles before lifting, coughing or sneezing.

2. Transversus Abdominus



This is your deepest tummy muscle that provides support to your lower back and pelvis. It is often weakened during pregnancy and inhibited by pain, therefore needs to be exercised.

Try this routine:

Place your fingertips on your lower tummy under your bump. As you breathe out, gently contract your lower tummy muscles drawing your bump gently in and away from your fingertips. Hold for 5-10 seconds as you continue to breathe normally.

Once you have mastered this, try this exercise whenever you know changing position is uncomfortable, for example getting up out of a chair, turning over in bed and going upstairs.

3. Pelvic tilt

- Lie with knees bent and 2-3 pillows behind you to ensure you aren't lying flat
- Gently draw in your lower tummy muscles and press your lower back into the bed
- You will feel your tailbone start to peel off the bed slightly as your pelvis tilts back
- Relax and let your pelvis return to the start position
- Repeat 5 times.

This exercise can also be performed in sitting and standing.

4. Gym ball exercises

When sitting on a gym ball your hips should be in line with your knees. You may find it quite comfortable simply sitting on the ball during your pregnancy as it can help relax tight muscles. Exercises to perform on the ball include gentle bounces, rolling your hips from side to side, performing a pelvic tilt on the ball, and circling your hips in both directions.

General exercise advice

Provided you do not suffer from any medical or obstetric complications light to moderate exercise is recommended during pregnancy as it can help your body cope with the stresses and strains of pregnancy and also prepare you for labour and motherhood. If you are unsure check which exercises are suitable for you with your doctor, midwife or physiotherapist.

If you need any further advice please contact your local Physiotherapy Department:

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick	(028) 44838053
Lagan Valley Hospital, Lisburn	(028) 92633539
Ards Community Hospital, Newtownards	(028) 91510242
Bangor Community Hospital, Bangor	(028) 91475113