



Back Pain in Pregnancy

Most women have back pain at some point during pregnancy. The pain can be mild or severe, but it can usually be treated. In some cases, it can be prevented.

Why Do Pregnant Women Have Back Pain?

Pregnancy hormones loosen all of your joints. Your growing abdomen changes your posture. These changes can increase the normal curves that are in your back which can cause back pain. Later in pregnancy the looser joints in the pelvis move more from the growing weight of your baby and this can cause general pain in your lower back and sometimes shooting pain in your buttock or upper legs.

What Makes the Pain Worse?

Lying on your back, sitting upright in a chair, rolling over at night or getting out of bed or out of a chair can cause back pain to be worse.

How Can I Avoid and Reduce Back Pain?

- Avoid sitting for long periods of time. Change positions and move frequently.
- Avoid bending; arching, and twisting motions, you will feel less discomfort.
- When lifting heavy things, keep your back straight and use your leg muscles instead of your back when picking things up.
- Whenever you are sitting, put your feet up on a stool or box so your hips tilt forward and the curve in your lower back flattens out.
- Many women get pain relief from using moist heat or cold packs, getting a massage, or sitting in a warm bath.
- Some women find wearing supportive, low-heeled shoes or an abdominal support binder can also help. Gentle exercise, along with walking 20 minutes most days, can relieve or lessen back pain. Exercise helps strengthen the back muscles, decrease muscle tightness and spasm, and keep the joints in good position.
- Sleeping on your side with a body pillow in your arms and between your knees may help as well.

What Strengthening Exercises Are Helpful?

The flip side of this sheet has exercises that will strengthen the back muscles. The exercises can be held for 3-5 seconds and repeated 10-30 times. Be sure not to hold your breath when you are doing them.

What Stretches Are Recommended?

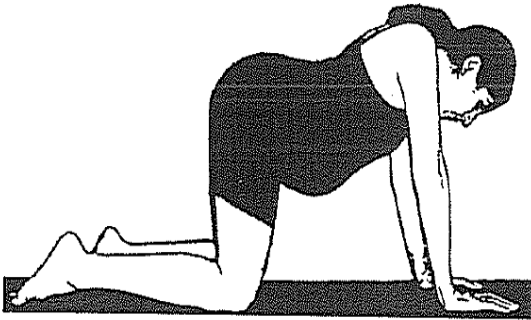
Stretching the back and hamstring muscles after a warm shower or short walk can help reduce back pain. Hold each stretch for 20 seconds, and repeat 2-3 times. See the flip side for directions.

What is Sciatica?

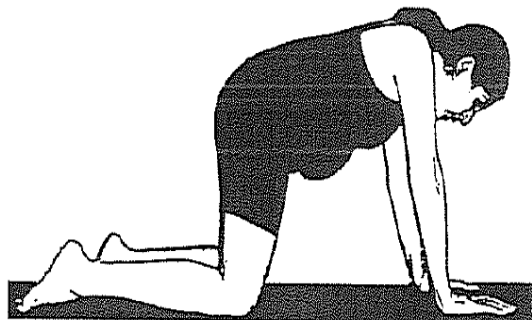
The sciatic nerve is a large nerve that runs down the back across the buttocks and down the back of your legs. Sciatica is pain in the sciatic nerve which is caused by pressure on the nerve. The symptoms of sciatica that are different from normal back pain in pregnancy are: pain down the buttock and back of your leg past your knee, tingling, numbness, or if you have trouble moving your leg. Sciatic pain usually goes away in 1 to 2 weeks.

Exercises for Back Pain During Pregnancy

Pelvic tilt start position: note arch in lower back

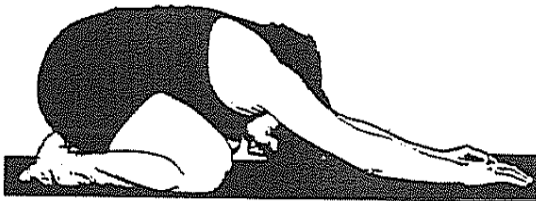


Pelvic tilt end position: note absence of arch in lower back.



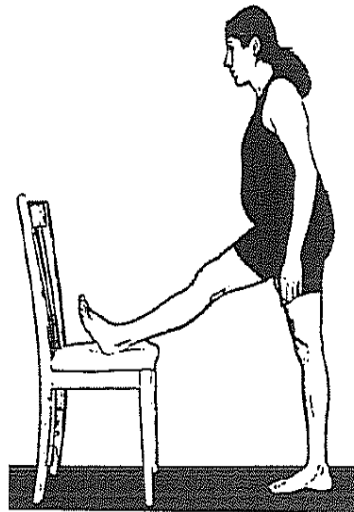
Kneel on your hands and knees, you'll notice an arch in your lower back. Tilt your pelvis backwards, so you flatten your back, keeping your buttocks relaxed.

Back stretch



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.

Hamstring Stretch



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.

References

American College of Nurse Midwives. Share with Women Series. Available at www.midwife.org