

## Chiropractic and Pregnancy

Low back pain is quite a common complaint in pregnancy. In fact, half to three quarters of women report pain at some time during their pregnancy. And, it goes without saying that most women experience this low back pain in the second half of their pregnancy. Many causes can be attributed to low back pain, including increased joint laxity (looseness) secondary to relaxin (a hormone released to help loosen the pelvic girdle during labour), altered posture resulting in excessive pressure on the spine, fluid retention, and weakening of the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. Low back pain during pregnancy can truly have negative effects on quality of life, sleep and energy levels.

**The most common risk factors for developing back pain during pregnancy include:**

- ✍ Back pain during a prior pregnancy
- ✍ Multiple pregnancies
- ✍ Advanced age

### **What you can do:**

A variety of treatments approaches are available for women suffering from low back pain during pregnancy. Many of the most effective approaches include chiropractic adjustive techniques, exercise, massage, acupuncture, heat and cold therapy, and relaxation exercises.

### **Benefits of Chiropractic Treatment (Adjustments):**

Chiropractic care throughout pregnancy has many benefits for both mother and child. Studies have demonstrated that chiropractic care results in an easier pregnancy, including increased comfort during the third trimester and delivery, and reduced need for analgesics (pain medication). One study indicated that receiving adjustments reduced the need for analgesics by 50%. Women receiving chiropractic care through their first pregnancy had 24 per cent shorter labour times and subjects giving birth for the second or third time reported 39 per cent shorter labour times. In another study, women receiving chiropractic care, including adjustments experienced a reduction in back pain after an average of just 2 visits and 4 days. There are no serious side effects associated with the adjustments, and patients have a high satisfaction rate, with 84 per cent of patients experiencing relief of back pain. Chiropractic care can also reduce the sharp pain felt in the lower back and sacral area during labour.

## Massage Therapy Treatments:

Massage therapy sessions during the second trimester have shown to reduce anxiety levels and depressed mood, as well as increase dopamine and serotonin levels while lowering cortisol levels. What does this mean? You simply feel much better!! Pregnant women receiving massage therapy also report improvements in their low back and leg pain.

## Exercises for Pregnancy related Low Back Pain:

Exercising throughout pregnancy increases fitness, promotes faster recovery from labour, improves muscle tone, and helps to prevent low back pain and urinary incontinence. An exercise program for prevention of low back pain should include training of the abdominal muscles and back, exercises for increasing circulation in the hip rotator muscles, and stretching of the hip external rotators and extensors.

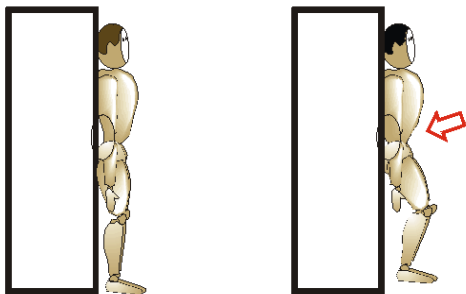
It is important to consult your health care provider before initiating any exercise program while pregnant. The following exercises may help reduce and prevent pregnancy related low back pain by strengthening the low back and core:

### Cat Stretch:



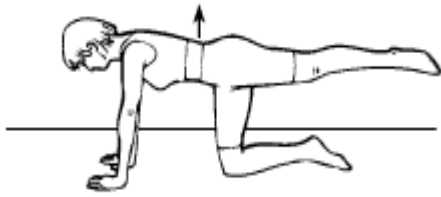
Let the head relax down, suck stomach muscles in toward the spine and arch spine up to the ceiling.

### Pelvic Tilt:



Instructions: Lean firmly against a wall. From this position, contract the stomach pulling the buttocks upwards and forwards. Try to push the arch of your back into the wall. Hold this position for 5 seconds, and then return to starting position.

### **Quadruped:**



*Figure 3: Quadruped single leg raise.*

Start on the hands and knees keeping the lower back straight. Extend one leg out to the back. Try not to twist the body. Hold the leg parallel to the floor for five seconds. Return to the starting position and repeat ten times. Then repeat with the opposite leg.

In addition to these exercises, pregnant women should also engage in 30 minutes of moderate, ongoing, low impact exercise per day. Swimming, stationary bicycling and brisk walking are excellent options. This will help contribute to normal, on time delivery and improve the likelihood of giving birth to a healthy baby. Exercising will also help prevent excessive weight gain, and will reduce the chances of developing gestational diabetes.

When exercising, try not to exceed a heart rate of 140 beats per minute. Stop exercising if you experience bleeding, cramping, faintness, dizziness, increased blood pressure or severe joint pain.

### **Acupuncture for Pregnancy related Low Back Pain:**

Acupuncture is a safe and effective treatment for pregnancy related low back pain. Recent research has indicated that women who received acupuncture for low back pain experienced greater pain reduction than those who received physiotherapy or standard care alone. Acupuncture has been shown to reduce pain, and increase function in pregnant women with low back pain.