

ADVICE SHEET FOR PREGNANCY RELATED BACK PAIN

HOW IS BACK PAIN RELATED TO PREGNANCY

During pregnancy, it is common for women to experience back pain. This pain usually starts in the second half of the pregnancy as your baby bump increases.

WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN DURING PREGNANCY

- **Weight gain:** Women usually gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy. The spine has to support this extra weight and can cause lower back pain. The weight of the baby also puts pressure on blood vessels and nerves which disrupts the back.
- **Posture change:** Your centre of gravity is switched when you become pregnant. Without noticing, you will gradually change your position and the way that you move, to accommodate for the new bump. This can increase the curve in your lower back and put added strain on the muscles and joints.
- **Hormone change:** Relaxin is made in the body to loosen ligaments of the pelvic area in preparation for the birthing process. This hormone also causes the ligaments supporting the spine to loosen, which can lead to instability and pain when walking or standing.
- **Muscle separation:** Your uterus expands and causes your muscles (the rectal abdominis muscles which run from the rib cage to the pubic bone) to separate along the centre seam. This separation can reduce the ability of your core muscles to support your spine.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Pain/ache/tightness across the lower back, which can radiate into the hips.
- Sciatic Pain – pain/ache that travels down the back of the leg(s). It can include numbness and/or pins and needles.
- Pubic Symphysis pain – pain through the front of the pelvis, typically worse when walking/standing.

HOW TO LOOK AFTER IT AT HOME

- **Exercise:** When you are hurting, you may feel the need to rest. However, bedrest is not normally helpful for lower back pain. Exercise is a common method used to relieve back pain:
 - It is a good idea to continue your current exercise regime and often with reduced intensity.

- Stretching exercises: increase the movement in the muscles used to support the back and legs can greatly reduce the build-up of tension.
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- Swimming: strengthens abdominal and lower back muscles and the buoyancy of the waters helps to relieve the strain from your joints, ligaments and from the extra weight from the bump.
- Walking: low-impact and keeps you moving
- Pelvic tilts: eases pain by stretching and strengthening muscles (e.g. cat stretch - on hands and knees, slowly arch your back and tuck in you buttocks in as you breathe in, then breathe out as you relax in a neutral position).
- **Improve posture:** Slouching puts a strain on your spine so be sure to sit up straight. When you are sleeping on your side, you can place a pillow between your knees because this will relieve stress from your back and pelvis.
- **Heat and Cold:** Apply heat and cold to your lower back to relax the muscles.

PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT

It is recommended to consult with a Chartered Physiotherapist to create an exercise program that is most suitable for you. It is important not to cause harm to the baby or put more strain on your back, so you need to be sure you are cleared to use different methods for back pain.

Manual therapy can also be very helpful in relieving pain and tightness.