

# Low Back Pain in Pregnancy

Low back pain is common in pregnancy. You may have had low back pain in the past or this maybe a new problem for you. During pregnancy the reproductive and maternal hormones cause connective tissue changes which result in a relative lengthening and weakening of the ligaments that support the pelvis and low back. In pregnancy there are also postural changes associated with the growing uterus that tend to put more strain on the low back. Finally as the abdomen grows some of the muscles that support the low back tend to lengthen and can weaken.

## Common treatments

Low back pain is treated by 1) improving posture and movement habits to avoid putting a strain on the back and 2) strengthening the muscles that support the back and improve posture.

Ice or heat your back in side lying, x 15 minutes, every 2-3 hours as needed.

A semi rigid pelvic brace is often used to help support the low back.

## How can I prevent low back pain or prevent it from getting worse?

- 1) Support the back when moving by tightening the pelvic floor (kegel) muscles and abdominal muscles before moving. To tighten the pelvic floor muscles, contract the muscles around the vagina and rectum as if to hold in urine and gas; your abdominal muscles will draw in towards your spine.
- 2) Position yourself to minimize the stress and strain on your low back:
  - a. Sleep with a pillow between your knees and ankles.
  - b. Sit with support at your low back
  - c. When standing for a long time, rest 1 foot on a small stool
- 3) Protect your low back when you move. Do not hold your breath.
  - a. To get into bed: Sit at edge of bed, move to your side with knees hip width apart. Roll to your back with knees held hip width apart rather than separating legs. To get out of bed: roll to your side (keeping knees hip width apart), lower legs over the edge of the bed and push with your bottom elbow and top hand against the bed.
  - b. To get out of a chair: come to the edge of the chair, keep your knees somewhat apart and squeeze buttocks as you stand up.
  - c. To get in a car: first sit down on the seat by backing in, keeping both knees together, pivot to get into car.
  - d. Bend your knees and hips when lifting. Avoid bending from the waist.
- 4) Avoid
  - a. Sitting on sofas or chairs that allow your hips to sink lower than your knees.
  - b. Excessive weight gain. Gain only as much weight as recommended by your health care provider
  - c. Wearing high heel shoes. Low heels are better during pregnancy
- 5) Strengthen the muscles that support the joint and help promote good posture.
  - a. Kegels + abdominals: tighten the vaginal/rectal muscles as if to hold in urine/gas. Then draw in lower abdominals as if to hug your baby while breathing normally. Hold for 5 seconds, do 10 repetitions. Do this exercise on all 4's position (hands and knees), sitting and standing.
  - b. Glut squeezes: tighten your bottom muscles hold 5 seconds, do 10 repetitions.
  - c. Stay as active as you can. Continue with aerobic exercise such as walking, swimming or pool exercise 4-5x/week.