

Pubic Symphysis Dysfunction

What is Pubic Symphysis Dysfunction?

Pubic symphysis dysfunction and pain are common in pregnancy. This problem seems to be associated with the normal changes that occur to the pelvic girdle during pregnancy. 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 pelvic girdle. In pregnancy there are also postural changes associated with the growing uterus that tend to put more strain on the pubic symphysis joint. Finally as the abdomen grows some of the muscles that support this joint tend to lengthen and weaken which can cause pubic symphysis and pelvic girdle dysfunction and pain.

Common treatments

Pubic symphysis dysfunction is treated by 1) modifying positioning, posture and movement habits to avoid putting a strain on the joint and 2) strengthening the muscles that support the joint and improve pelvic girdle posture. Ice or heat can be used to give symptom relief. Sometimes a semi rigid brace is used to help stabilize the joint.

How can I prevent pubic symphysis dysfunction or prevent it from getting worse?

- 1) Support the joint 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 when you do this.
- 2) Position yourself to minimize the stress and strain on the joint:
 - a. Sleep with a pillow between your knees and ankles to keep your legs about hip width apart.
 - b. Sit with your back supported and knees apart.
 - c. Stand with your feet just slightly farther apart than hips. (Don't stand with your feet close together.)
- 3) Move in ways to protect the joint
 - a. To move in and out of bed: Sit at edge of bed, move to side lying with knees hip width apart. Roll with knees held hip width apart rather than separating legs.
 - b. To get out of a chair come to the edge of the chair, keep knees somewhat apart and squeeze buttocks as you move to standing.
 - c. To get in a car first sit down, then pivot keeping knees together to get into car.
 - d. Walk with smaller steps.
- 4) Avoid
 - a. Knees together or crossing legs in sitting.
 - b. Sitting on sofas or chairs that allow your hips to sink lower than your knees.
 - c. Activity with legs far apart.
 - d. Pushing an object with one leg or stepping over an obstacle (like a baby gate).
- 5) Strengthen the muscles that support the joint and help promote good posture in pregnancy
 - 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 your hands and knees, sitting and standing.
 - b. Gluteal squeezes: Tighten buttock muscles hold for 5 seconds, do 10 repetitions in the above 3 different positions Adductor squeezes: sitting with your knees hip width apart squeeze a folded pillow. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 10 times.

