

Sciatica In Pregnancy

The Sciatic nerve is sandwiched between the deep buttock muscles. Sciatica is irritation of the nerve that can result from those muscles tightening or other postural changes that put stress on the nerve. Sciatica is common in pregnancy. You may have had problems with sciatica in the past or this may be a new problem. The sciatic nerve can be irritated from the postural changes that occur due to the growing uterus. As your posture changes the deep hip muscles may increase their activity and this can also irritate this nerve.

Common Treatments: 1) modifying positioning, posture and movement habits to avoid putting a strain on the sciatic nerve and 2) stretching the muscles that are irritating the nerve 3) strengthening the muscles that support the hip and improve posture. Ice is often better than heat for symptom relief. Ice while in side lying for 15 minutes every 2-3 hours for pain relief.

How can I prevent sciatica 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 hip and sciatic nerve:
 - a. Sleep with 2 fat pillows between your knees and ankles.
 - b. Avoid slumping, sit with support at your low back with knees apart.
 - c. Unlock knees in standing.
- 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) Stretching:

On all 4's (hands and knees position)

 - 1) Knees are hip width apart; shift your hips backward toward your heels (keep your hands placed under your shoulders), hold this stretch for 20 seconds and return to original position
 - 2) Arch your back up (like a cat) to stretch, lean back or forward to shift the stretch
- 6) Strengthening:

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. Build to 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

c. Side lying clam shell: Lie on your side with hips bent at a 45 degree angle and a pillow between knees and ankles. While keeping your spine still (do not roll backward), do a small kegel (pelvic floor contraction) then lift top knee (keeping your ankles together), like a clam shell opening. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 10 times. Build to 3 sets of 10 repetitions.