

## Pain During Pregnancy

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Many women have some low back pain during pregnancy. What about sharp stabbing pain that makes it difficult to work or take care of kids? Many women assume it is just part of pregnancy and that nothing can be done safely during pregnancy to help. Both of these statements are untrue. Sharp severe pain that limits activity is not a normal part of pregnancy, although it is somewhat common. There are some successful pain relieving treatments that are safe during pregnancy. Physical therapists are specialized in treatment of muscle and joint dysfunction. Some physical therapists have further specialized in treatment of pregnant and postpartum women. Several visits with a physical therapist that specializes in women's health can greatly increase the comfort of pregnancy and allow you to stay active.

### What structures might contribute to pregnancy pain?

Pregnancy pain is usually found along the sciatic nerve (down the buttocks and back of the thigh). It is often described as sharp and stabbing, sometimes causing the knees to buckle. It is most common during or after activities such as vacuuming, shopping, cleaning, bathing small children, and rolling in the bed. Some women have a strong dull ache across the low back especially after standing or at the end of the day. The hormones that prepare the body for delivery also cause the joints of the pelvis to loosen. These loose joints can become strained and contribute to the pain. Muscles around the sore joints may go into spasm and contribute to the cycle. The sciatic nerve is deep in the pelvis and it is not possible for the baby to "sit" on this nerve during pregnancy. It is possible for this nerve to be irritated by the joints and muscles around it.

### What types of treatments are safe during pregnancy?

Heat is often helpful to loosened muscle spasms but it is often not enough. A combination of heat, massage (even spouses or friends can learn this type of massage), and specially prescribed stretching exercises can decrease pain. Some women exercise vigorously throughout their pregnancy. This can help back pain however; stretching exercises for pain during pregnancy are very easy and do not strain even the weakest patients. The most important part of therapy is to learn how to move and position yourself to protect the joints and muscles that are effected.

The therapist will use special massage techniques to loosen specific muscles. This also helps to keep the bones aligned. It may be helpful for you to have a total body massage. Some patients find pregnancy binders also help decrease pain. [Pregnancy binders and braces](#) come in many forms and none are perfect. Medical professionals with experience in pregnancy bracing can help you choose a brace for your specific situation.

Do you know how to sit, stand, walk, get in and out of the car, carry objects, reach and bend? It is important to move and rest correctly to ensure healing. Manipulations of joints during pregnancy may not be necessary as the joints are often loosened. Gentle moving of bones can help to decrease pain. However, the bones will most likely go back to the shifted position if you do not change the poor movement patterns. Sometimes you can learn how to move your own bones and reposition the joints to a less painful position.

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Can therapy take all my pain away?

NO. Physical therapy for pain during pregnancy has three goals: to decrease the intensity of pain, to decrease how often the pain occurs, and to help you learn some techniques you can use to get yourself out of pain. Most women find that they can be more active and most do not need therapy after delivery. Women usually need 3 to 6 visits and most health insurance covers this therapy. Pregnancy is a mix of excitement, joy, fatigue, fear, anticipation, and change. There is no need for severe pain to be added to this list. There are things that can decrease pain.

Try these simple ideas first and speak to your doctor about physical therapy for back pain