Pregnancy Related Low Back Pain

Low back pain during pregnancy is quite common. In fact, between 50-75% of all pregnant women will experience low back pain. The pain is usually caused from rapid changes in weight, posture, gait and hormones.

The average woman gains between 20-40 pounds throughout pregnancy. This weight gain moves your center of gravity forward, causing your pelvis to tilt and your lower back to sway – placing excessive stress on the ligaments, discs, and joints of your spine.

Pregnancy-related low back pain typically starts between the fifth and seventh month of pregnancy, although a significant portion of women experience pain sooner. Symptoms often begin at the base of your spine and may radiate into your buttock or thigh. Discomfort is often aggravated by prolonged standing, sitting, coughing, or sneezing. Your symptoms may increase throughout the day, and some patients report nighttime pain that disturbs their sleep. The extremes of activity seem to contribute to pregnancy-related low back pain – with increased risk for both “sedentary” and “physically demanding” lifestyles. Patients who have suffered with back pain prior to pregnancy are more than twice as likely to re-develop back pain during pregnancy.

Be sure to tell your doctor if your symptoms include fever, chills, bleeding, spotting, unusual discharge, cramping, sudden onset pelvis pain, light-headedness, shortness of breath, chest pain, headache, calf pain or swelling, decreased fetal movement, or symptoms that radiate beyond your knee.

Unfortunately, pregnancy related low back pain occurs at a time when your medical treatment options are limited. Not surprisingly, over 90% of prenatal health care providers would recommend drug-free treatment, including the type of alternative therapy provided in this office. Studies have shown that chiropractic manipulation provides significant relief of pregnancy-related low back pain. Almost 75% of women undergoing chiropractic care report significant pain reduction with improved ability to function.

Most patients will also benefit from continuing aerobic exercise throughout pregnancy. The US Department of Health and Human Services advises that healthy pregnant women may begin or continue moderate intensity aerobic exercise for at least 150 minutes per week. Women should not begin “vigorous” exercise during pregnancy, but those who were preconditioned to vigorous exercise may continue. Be sure to check with your doctor prior to initiating or increasing any exercise program while you are pregnant.

Be sure to take frequent breaks from prolonged sitting or standing. You may find benefit by using a small foot stool to alternate feet while standing. Sleeping with a pillow between the knees in a side lying posture may help you to rest more comfortably. You should wear shoes with good arch supports. In some cases, your chiropractor may recommend a sacroiliac belt or pelvic support belt to help relieve your pregnancy-related low back pain.

Our goal is to get you out of pain as fast as possible; then teach you how to stay out of pain so we don't have to see you anymore!
**Joint Manipulation**

Your chiropractor has found joints in your body that are not moving freely. This can cause tightness and discomfort and can accelerate unwanted degeneration i.e. arthritis. Your chiropractor will apply a gentle force with their hands, or with hand held instruments, in order to restore motion to any “restricted” joints. Sometimes a specialized table will be used to assist with these safe and effective “adjustments”. Joint manipulation improves flexibility, relieves pain and helps maintain healthy joints.

**Myofascial Release**

Overworked muscles often become tight and develop knots or “trigger points”. Chronic tightness produces inflammation and swelling that ultimately leads to the formation of “adhesions” between tissues. Your chiropractor will apply pressure with their hands, or with specialized tools, in order to release muscle tightness and soft-tissue adhesions. This will help to improve your circulation, relieve pain and restore flexibility.

**Therapeutic Exercise**

Muscle tightness or weakness causes discomfort and alters normal joint function, leading to additional problems. Your chiropractor will target tight or weak muscles with specific therapeutic stretching and strengthening to help increase tissue flexibility, build strength, and ease pain. Healthy, strong, and flexible muscles may help prevent re-injury.

**TREATMENT GOALS AND OUTCOME MEASURES**

Your treatment will be most effective when scheduled at a rate of 3 times per week for 2 weeks. After this initial course of treatment we will reassess to make sure that you have met your initial treatment goal of at least 25% overall improvement. We will determine the need for any additional care after your reassessment.

**THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF**

**Workstation Ergonomics**

Ergonomics is the science of adjusting your workstation to minimize strain in the following ways:

- Monitors should be visible without leaning or straining and the top line of type should be 15 degrees below eye level.
- Use audio equipment that keeps you from bending your neck (i.e., Bluetooth, speakerphones, headsets).
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and elbows bent to 90 degrees.
- Wrists should not be bent while at the keyboard. Forearms and wrists should not be leaning on a hard edge.
- Keep frequently used objects, like your telephone, close to your body to prevent excessive reaching.
- Take a 10-second break every 20 minutes: Micro activities include: walking, stretching, or moving...
your head in a “plus sign” fashion.
✓ Periodically, perform the “Brugger relief position” - Position your body at a chair’s edge, feet pointed outward. Weight should be on your legs and your abdomen should be relaxed. Tilt your pelvis forward, lift your sternum, arch your back, drop your arms, and roll out your palms while squeezing your shoulders together. Take a few deep cleansing breaths.

Sitting workstations
✓ Hips and knees bent 90 degrees, feet flat on floor or footrest.
✓ Use a lumbar roll for lower back support.
✓ Avoid sitting on anything that would create an imbalance or uneven pressure (like your wallet).

Standing Workstations
✓ Keep your head, neck, torso, and legs vertically aligned
✓ Wear shoes that provide proper arch support
✓ Use a footrest to shift your weight from foot to foot.
✓ Adjust the footrest to approximately 10% of your total body height.

Lifting Mechanics
Here are some tips to help you lift safely:
✓ Avoid lifting or flexing before you've had the chance to warm up your muscles (especially when you first awaken or after sitting or stooping for a period of time).
✓ To lift, stand close directly facing object with your feet shoulder width apart.
✓ Squat down by bending with your knees, not your back. Imagine a fluorescent light tube strapped to your head and hips when bending. Don’t “break” the tube with improper movements. Tuck your chin to help keep your spine aligned.
✓ Slowly lift by thrusting your hips forward while straightening your legs.
✓ Keep the object close to your body, within your powerzone” between your hips and chest. Do not twist your body, if you must turn while carrying an object, reposition your feet, not your torso.

An alternative lifting technique for smaller objects is the golfers lift. Swing one leg directly behind you. Keep your back straight while your body leans forward. Placing one hand on your thigh or a sturdy object may help.

Entering & Exiting a Vehicle
Entering and exiting your vehicle is a potential risky activity for low back pain sufferers. Follow these tips to limit problems:
✓ To enter the vehicle, open the door and stand with your back to the seat, legs close to the side of the vehicle. For larger vehicles, you may wish to begin by standing on the running board. Place your hands on the door and door frame to keep your movements slow and controlled then slowly lower your body into the vehicle.
✓ Tuck your head into the vehicle. Keep your knees close to each other, as though they have been taped together, brace your abdomen as though you are about to be punched in the stomach and pivot your body as a whole without twisting or bending at the waist. You may grasp the steering wheel with your right hand to help you pivot.
✓ Use a lumbar roll or other support to help maintain good posture. Position the roll slightly above your belt to support the “small of your back”. Adjust your seat so that your knees are slightly lower than your hips. Try to avoid prolonged car rides - take frequent breaks.
✓ Before exiting, create adequate space by pushing your vehicle seat back as far as possible and move the steering wheel up and out of the way. To exit, first scoot slightly to the door side edge of your seat, then keep your knees together and pivot with the same cautions that you used to enter the vehicle. When your feet are shoulder width apart and firmly on the ground or running board, grasp the door and door frame, lean forward, but be sure not to bend your back, as you tighten your abdominal muscles. Slowly thrust your hips forward to stand up.

The following exercises have been specifically selected to assist with your recovery and help minimize future problems. Exercises should be performed slowly and within a relatively comfortable range. Maintain good posture
and breathe naturally. Do not hold your breath. Unless otherwise instructed, stop any exercises that cause pain, or radiating symptoms.

### Phase I

**Cat/Camel (Pregnant patient)**

Begin on all 4’s, keeping your back in neutral position. Keep your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Extend your neck and back at the same time into a “Mad Cat” position. Next, flex your neck and back at the same time to drop into an “Old Horse” position. Repeat in a slow coordinated movement for 20 repetitions. Perform 3 sets of 20 repetitions twice per day or for symptom relief. If you have sharp pain or radiation of pain extending into your back or leg, discontinue and consult with your doctor.

**Quadruped Brace (Pregnant patient)**

The simple goal of “bracing” is to tighten your abdominal wall in order to protect your spine. To brace contract your abdominal muscles while gently bearing down while pushing your sides outward. This provides stability to your back throughout exercises or activities that require you to use your back. This exercise is performed on your hands and knees to minimize load on your spine. When performing bracing exercises, your abdominal wall should not be “sucked in” nor “pushed out”. Do not move your spine or pelvis. This exercise should be performed throughout the day to assist in spine stability during any activity requiring you to lift, twist, or flex your spine.
**Bird Dog (Pregnant patient)**

Begin on your hands and knees in an all 4's position. Tighten your abdomen using the aforementioned “quadruped brace” maneuver. Extend your right leg and left arm into a fully straightened “bird dog” position. Hold this contraction for two seconds and return to the all 4’s position. Imagine a glass of water on your back and try not to spill it throughout the exercise. Do not arch your back or twist your hips at any point. Repeat with your opposite limbs, slowly alternating for three complete sets of 10 repetitions, two times per day, or as directed.

**Clam (Pregnant patient)**

Lie on your side with your affected hip pointing up. You may elect to place a pillow under your stomach to make this exercise more comfortable. With your feet together, knees bent at 90 degrees and hips at 45 degrees, lift your knee upward without rolling your hips backward. Lower your legs so that your knees are touching and repeat on each side for three sets of 10 repetitions once per day or as directed.

**Phase II**

**Side Bridge (Pregnant patient)**

Begin lying on your side. Rest your weight on your forearm and knee. Lift your hips forward and toward the ceiling until your body is in a straight “plank” position. Hold for three seconds. Slowly lower your hips back to the floor and repeat for three sets of 10 repetitions twice per day on each side, or as directed.

**Deep Squatting (Pregnant patient)**

Deep squatting exercises may increase gluteal and pelvic floor muscle strength. Strong muscles help to stabilize your pelvis by supporting your sacroiliac joint. This prevents pain caused by ligaments that have loosened from pregnancy hormones. To perform deep squatting, begin standing with your feet slightly wider than your shoulders. While keeping your knees directly over your feet- slowly lower your hips to a comfortable depth (imagine sitting down into a chair). Do not allow your knees to move forward over the top of your feet during any part of this exercise. You will probably need to extend your arms forward for balance. Stand up and repeat three sets of 10 repetitions, twice per day or as directed.