

## Back Pain and Pregnancy

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### Why Pregnancy Causes Back Pain

- Hormonal changes of pregnancy make all joints, including the back, weak and less stable
- The enlarging uterus distorts the spine
- Stomach muscles, which help support the spine, stretch and weaken
- Weight gain and changes in posture double the force on the joints of the spine and pelvis
- Fluid retention adds to weakness of tissue that helps support the spine
- Distortion may cause or worsen shifting of lower spine joints
- Disc herniation rarely causes back pain in pregnancy

### Prevention

- Before pregnancy, work toward your ideal body weight
- Before pregnancy, exercise to strengthen your stomach and back muscles
- Eat a healthy diet and exercise during pregnancy to optimize weight gain
  - See separate chapters on diet and exercise during pregnancy
- Wear low heeled (not flat) shoes with good arch supports
- If you must stand for long periods, alternate placing one foot then the other on a low foot stool
- Do not lift objects, including toddlers, over 25 pounds
- Squat, bend your knees and keep your back straight when lifting

- Use a moderately firm mattress
- Place a body pillow between your legs to prevent crossing them when sleeping
- Use a chair with good lower back support
- Consider yoga taught back a certified perinatal yoga instructor

### Treatment

- Ice the area of pain two to four times daily for 45 to 60 minutes
  - Packs of frozen vegetables make great, reusable ice packs
  - Change out packs as they warm
  - Want area to be numb for around 30 minutes
  - Once iced, stretch the muscles in the area of pain then walk for a few minutes on flat ground
- May take Tylenol before icing
  - Check with your doctor before taking any other pain medicines
- Maternity belts (“pregnancy girdles”) are helpful
  - Quality Home Health Care in Sanford, any maternity store
- Consider referral for physical therapy if covered by your insurance
- Take time each day, if possible, to lay on your side with your knees and hips bent
  - Place a body pillow between your legs and a pillow beneath your belly

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