

Before Baby

CHIROPRACTIC ADVICE FOR MOMS-TO-BE

The weight gain, the bloating, the nausea... Most new mothers will tell you that the aches and pains of pregnancy are a small price to pay for the beautiful bundle of joy they're rewarded with at the end of their nine-month journey.

But as many new mothers can attest, the muscle strains of pregnancy are very real and can be more than just a nuisance. The average weight gain of 25 to 35 pounds, combined with the increased stress placed on the body by the baby, can sometimes result in severe discomfort. In fact, studies have found that about half of all expectant mothers will develop lower back pain at some point during their pregnancy. This is especially true during late pregnancy, when the baby's head presses down on a woman's back, legs and buttocks, putting pressure on her sciatic nerve. And for those who already suffer from low back pain, the problem can become even worse.

While these changes sound dramatic, Mother Nature does step in to help accommodate them. During pregnancy, hormones are released that help loosen the ligaments attached to the pelvic bones. But even these natural changes designed to accommodate the growing baby can result in postural imbalances, causing pregnant women to be more prone to awkward trips and falls.

What Can You Do?

The following tips are recommended for pregnant women looking for relief from the discomforts of pregnancy:

Safe exercise during pregnancy can help strengthen your muscles and prevent discomfort. Try exercising at least three times a week, preceded and concluded by a gentle stretching routine. If you weren't active before your pregnancy, however, now is not the time to start a new fitness routine. Check with your doctor before starting or continuing any exercise regimen during pregnancy.

Walking, swimming and stationary cycling are relatively safe cardiovascular exercises for pregnant women as they do not require jerking or bouncing movements.

Wear flat, sensible shoes. Not only can high or chunky heels be uncomfortable, they can also exacerbate postural imbalances and cause you to be less steady on your feet than you already are.

When picking up older children — or any other object for that matter — bend from the knees, not the waist.

When sleeping, lie on your side with a pillow between your knees to take pressure off your lower back. Many women find that full-length 'body pillows' or 'pregnancy wedges' are especially helpful during pregnancy. Lying on your left side is ideal. This position allows unobstructed blood flow, and helps your kidneys flush waste from your body.

If you have a job that requires you to sit at a computer for long hours, be sure your workstation is ergonomically correct. Position the computer monitor so that the top of the screen is at or below your eye level, and place your feet on a small footrest to take pressure off your legs and feet. Also, take periodic breaks every 30 minutes by taking a quick walk around the office.

Eat small meals or snacks every four to five hours to help keep nausea or extreme hunger at bay. Good snacks include crackers or yogurt, bland foods that are high in carbohydrates and protein. Keep saltines in your desk drawer or purse to help stave off waves of morning sickness that can, unfortu-

nately, occur at any time throughout the day.

Folic acid supplements — at least 400 micrograms (mcg) a day — before and during pregnancy have been shown to decrease the risk of neural tube birth defects, such as spina bifida. Some doctors recommend even more for women who are already pregnant or who have previously given birth to a child with a neural tube defect. However, check with your doctor before taking this or any other vitamin or herbal supplement.

Get plenty of rest. Don't let the demands of work and family life put you and your baby at risk. Pamper yourself, and ask for help if you need it. Take a nap if you're tired, or lie down and elevate your feet for a few moments when you need a break.

Visit the Chiropractor

Before you become pregnant, your doctor of chiropractic can detect any pre-existing imbalances in the pelvis or elsewhere in your body that could make pregnancy discomfort even worse.

Many pregnant women have found that chiropractic adjustments provide relief from the increased low back pain brought on by pregnancy. Also, scientific studies have found that spinal manipulation carries no increased risk to the pregnant woman or her baby. Recent studies show that labour and delivery can be reduced by 40-50 per cent in women who receive chiropractic care. Chiropractic's non-drug, non-surgical approach to back pain can be especially attractive to pregnant women who are trying to avoid over-the-counter and prescription drugs.

Chiropractic care can also be helpful after childbirth. In the eight weeks following labor and delivery, the ligaments that loosened during pregnancy begin to tighten up again. Ideally, joint problems brought on during pregnancy from improper lifting or reaching should be treated before the ligaments return to their pre-pregnancy state. Your doctor of chiropractic can help.

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